



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



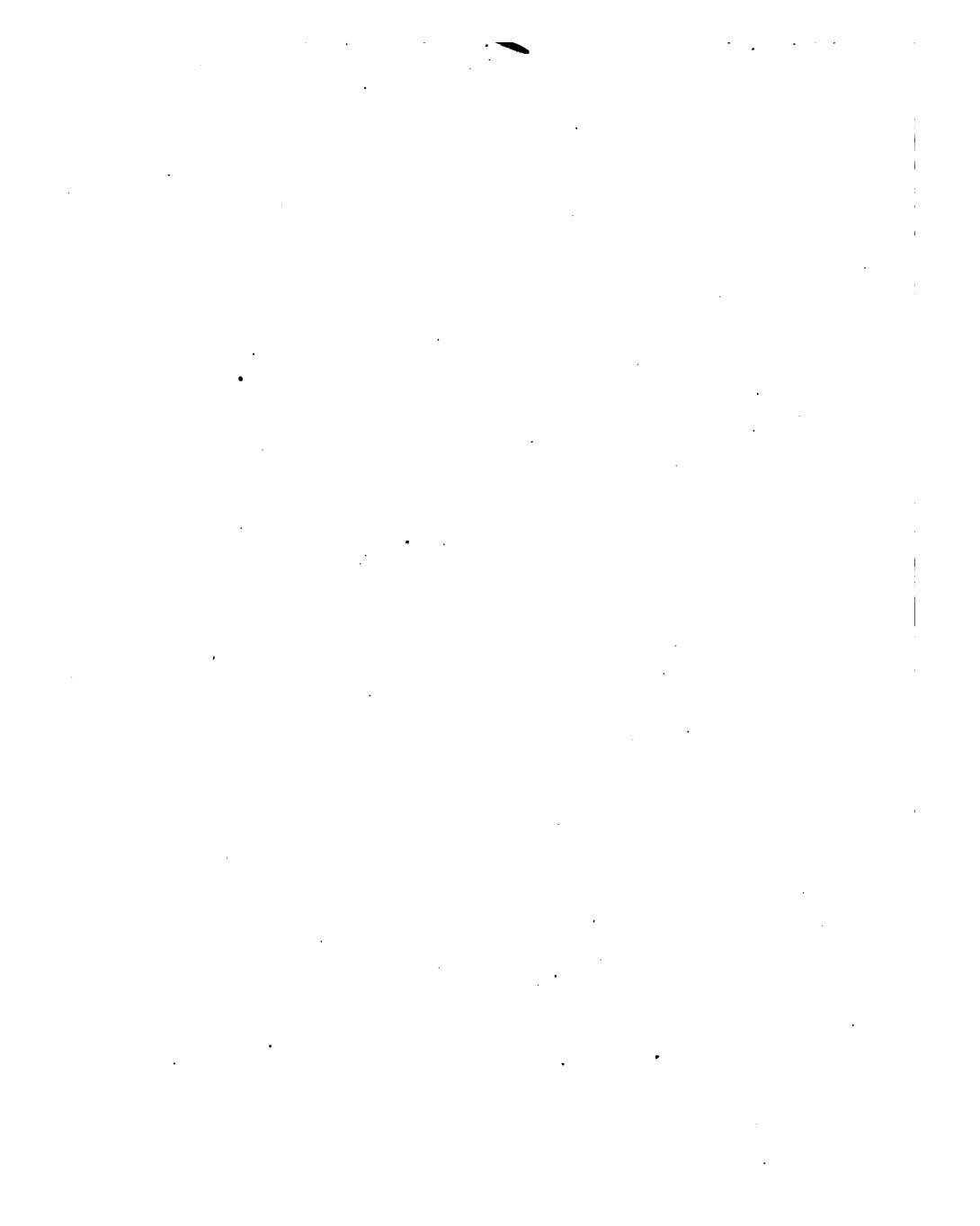
QUEEN AMETHYST



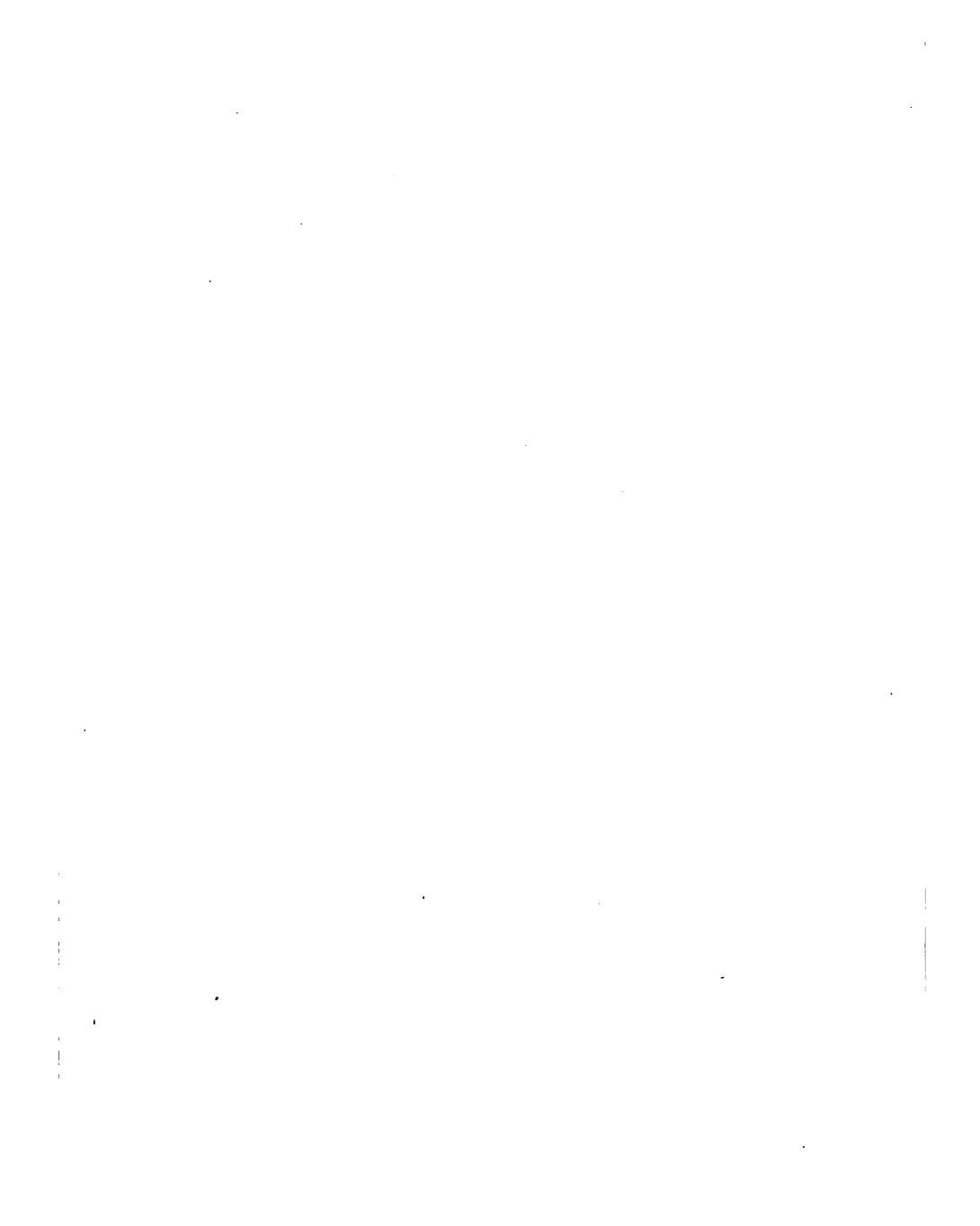
By
HENRY BLUNT







QUEEN AMETHYST







"The bird lit on his shoulder with a tiny wreath of the sweetest myrtle bloom."—p. 13.

QUEEN AMETHYST

OR

The Lips of Snow

By HENRY BLUNT

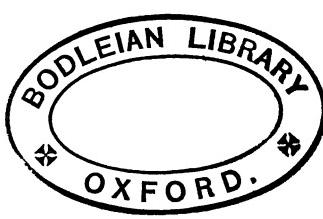
WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS



LONDON: MARCUS WARD & CO., LIMITED
ORIEL HOUSE, FARRINGDON STREET, E.C.
AND AT BELFAST AND NEW YORK

1884

2533 . f. 142 .



CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.—PRINCE EYEBRIGHT,	.	9
II.—ELIDORE'S BROTHER,	.	15
III.—THE PRINCE'S COUNSEL,	.	22
IV.—THE PRINCE'S DOOM,	.	30
V.—THE PRINCE LIVES AND LEARNS,	.	40
VI.—THE PESTILENCE,	.	51
VII.—FRESH ALARMS,	.	56
VIII.—THE ENEMY,	.	66
IX.—ISABEL,	.	73
X.—OSCAR,	.	86
XL—THE PRINCE'S REQUEST,	.	98
XII.—BOTANY,	.	107
XIII.—MORE BOTANY,	.	114
XIV.—THE BETROTHAL,	.	124
XV.—THE YOUNG HUNTSMAN,	.	134
XVI.—THE WEDDING,	.	142
XVII.—THE END,	.	151

List of Illustrations.

	PAGE
"The bird lit on his shoulder with a tiny wreath of the sweetest myrtle bloom	<i>(Frontispiece)</i> 13
"She wept much on her knees,"	14
Elidore's Brother,	15
"Elidore flung herself on his breast,"	19
"Advising her as her father might have done,"	23
"Kneeling down then and there,"	35
"The awkward present of a young hedgehog,"	43
"She stood, framed in the ivied porch,"	46
"Another and another victim was struck,"	52
His Sister's Portrait,	63
"Now rise, Sir Prince,"	71
Daffodils,	79
"He waited for an answer,"	84
"'You promise?' she said,"	95
"The Prince sat on the throne,"	99
"He lay on the crisp, sweet grass,"	112
"Amethyst looked at him straight for a moment,"	122
"The two young things knelt before him,"	133
Queen Amethyst,	154

QUEEN AMETHYST.

CHAPTER I.

PRINCE EYEBRIGHT.

LONG ago, in a happy little kingdom—happy, because the people's hearts were knit as one round the good old king ; and so little, that the king at his best and strongest had known nearly every face in it,—in this happy little kingdom lived a young and handsome prince. *The Prince* he was, his father's only child and heir. You would certainly have called him handsome, had you seen him in the modest dark-green suit he always wore, with just a little silver lace, which seemed to have grown in its proper place by nature. This humble attire the laws compelled the king's sons

to wear. But how well it sat on the Prince, with his short dark locks curling over a pale brow, and a dark eye, keen as his father's used to be, but sad withal, and weary at times. Sad and weary seemed the eyes when at rest, and worn and thin the pale delicate features of the beardless face; for the Prince was very young, though his royal cares and the burden of greatness had made him old and thoughtful enough, even without the special sorrow of the sad doom that lay upon him. Old and thoughtful?—nay, right fatherly and wise you would have said, had you heard his grave, brotherly counsel to young Lady Elidore. A bright, black-eyed girl she was—shall I say a trifle bold and saucy?—no. Brave, we will say—and oh, so sweet! But—well, well, it *was* said among the ladies at the court that she was—for shame!—wooing the young Prince.

They were a foolish people in that kingdom, and had a bad habit of saying plainly what they meant. The old king was no better than the rest, and it had cost the people a sharp little war two years before. But they never gave up the bad habit, yet were a happy little

kingdom. The powerful neighbour whom they fought had learned that they were not to be meddled with, except for a better reason than had come yet. To *make it come*, in the shape of pretext and preparation, had been, ever since the war, the powerful neighbour's daily work, and the knowledge of this kept the young Prince and his counsellors more anxious. But he always had a grave, gracious smile for Elidore, whose devotion to him was, the court ladies said, shamefully forward and conspicuous, while her long-established suitor was most cruelly snubbed and put aside.

Brimont, her suitor, was a plain man of few words or graces ; he had been the Prince's comrade in old times at school, and was now second officer in his army. It was *said* that he had twice saved the Prince's life in the late war ; but as the thing was done, the first time in a midnight surprise, and the second time in a confused scattered battle in a blinding fog, none could know certainly except the two young men themselves. And as Brimont said nothing of it, and, strange to say, Prince Egbert (or Eyebright) kept as close a silence, Brimont's loyalty remained in the fog and darkness.

And Elidore did not believe in it. She declared that "The man couldn't even say Bo to a goose." All in vain did her aunt, the sister-in-law of Brimont's mother, strive to show her that saying Bo to a goose and deliberately putting your head in the way of an axe are very different things. Whether this consciousness was any comfort to Brimont as he passed unnoticed—in vain trying to catch rapt Elidore's eye, which followed the Prince as he returned from the wars—I cannot say. I only know that Elidore's conduct grew worse and worse.

Of one of this strange girl's tricks I must tell you, it was so pretty, though (the old maidens said, and they ought to know) so very unmaidenly. The Prince once had a sister. This sister had a white dove. This dove her brother, after her death, cherished for love of her. It would fly to him, hunting or in the council chamber, alight on his shoulder, and peck his cheek. This dove Elidore stole ; and the next thing the Prince saw of his dead sister's pet was this. As he came out of church one day, supporting his old father, the bird lit on his

shoulder with a tiny wreath of the sweetest myrtle-bloom that ever blew. You see the whole scene very prettily set forth in the picture that forms the frontispiece to this book. Now Elidore's myrtle was famed—there was none like it in the land. I wish the picture could show you how green its leaves were, and how sweet a scent breathed itself out of its white flowers. The plant had been given her by Egbert's poor sister Princess Isabel, who had been Elidore's bosom friend. Moreover, her theft of the dove had not escaped a whispered suspicion. So, putting two and two together, the thing was as plain as A B C. "And what ever did the Prince do?" You shall hear. Beckoning Brimont to slip his arm into the place of his own, with an excuse in his father's ear, the Prince, throwing the dove back to Elidore, turned back into the church, and, kissing the wreath, knelt and laid it before the altar, and came back and took Brimont's place again graver than ever. Poor Elidore had not seen, but soon heard, the fate of her wreath, and she saw it in the evening round the golden cross in the church. The meaning of the

Prince's deed she felt, but could not rightly think out and understand. And she wept much on her knees before the altar, where the myrtle-fragrance blended with the lingering incense. She felt the meaning, I say, but could not fully understand it. However, it was soon plain enough.



"She wept much on her knees."

C H A P T E R I I.

ELIDORE'S BROTHER.

ELIDORE had a brother, Edric, a proud, nervous man, student by taste, soldier by profession, an old friend of Brimont's. Indeed Brimont was his only friend, and, except his sister Elidore, the only living creature that he loved. Now what had worked in Edric's mind could not fully be known. We may say, first of all, that, shutting himself up in pride, and disliking his profession, he grew bitter and irritable. Then intense study—he went into battle with a book in his hand—affected his brain, and made him still more touchy and suspicious. In fact, it had become a need of life to him to



Elidore's Brother.

find an enemy at whose door he could lay his inward discomfort, and upon whom he could vent it. Now the Prince's commanding nature was just of the kind to offend Edric's susceptibilities. Throughout the war, of course, the Prince *was* everywhere and in everything; and it is not to be supposed that the Prince was perfect in the treatment of his subordinates. Could you blame a young man, born to rule, with the cares of a war and a kingdom pressing on him before the time, let alone his own sorrowful secret—could any mortal man blame him for treading on a subordinate's toes? But Edric had read, and thought, and fumed, till he was more in his own eyes than other mortals. In the great cavalry charge (we will say that for him) his body did the duty of a gentleman. He rode and cut fearlessly and well. How could he else? The bodily machine, well trained in the royal riding and fencing schools, was going through its mechanical work with no sense or knowledge. Brimont was the first to discover the deep cut across Edric's head. Edric's mind had been far away, with the little book—mechanically dropped at the bugle-

call, and lost, to his great sorrow afterwards. With this, Edric's mind was far away, hunting for ever the secret of the rainbow. At night, in the tent, the wounded man sorely tried poor unwounded Brimont's head and patience with a long discourse on white sounds and musical arithmetic, of which Brimont could not understand one word. In his humility he quite believed that Edric was achieving surpassing heights of science and philosophy; but at last he could stand it no longer, and, forcing his friend into his camp bed, he went out to escape the endless talk.

Well, Edric paid a bitter penalty for all this. Some time or other Egbert did tread upon his toes—gave some order across him, superseded some direction of his, or what not. Edric felt aggrieved. That was the long and the—no, *not* the short of it. The grievance kept growing for ever and ever. Next it was Egbert's ungenerous silence about Brimont's devotion to him. The Prince could not be got to say a syllable about it, or rather was understood to contradict the reports, and some thought Brimont wronged. Anyhow, Edric did. Then his sister's un-

requited infatuation about the Prince was drawing her away from his only friend, to whom he, her guardian—for they were orphans—considered her affianced. Under these circumstances, he ought surely to have felt thankful to the Prince for the delicate fashion in which he put away from himself poor Elidore's love-token. But no. Nothing the Prince could do, or had done, ever was or could possibly be right in poor Edric's eyes.

Then something very unpleasant took place. Out of doors, at a festival—unveiling a monument to those who had fallen in the war—the Prince was turning to speak to the people, who thronged, gentle and simple, within two or three yards from him, where he stood at the foot of the monument. As it happened, only two or three of his lords and ladies were about him, among the latter Elidore. Elidore was at the Prince's left, near her was Edric, and then Brimont not far off. And in a great bow before them was the front of the mingled holiday crowd. Egbert was not acting for his father—it was rather a personal affair, and he had around him, assisting, just his own personal friends, of

whom he had very few. Well then, as he turned to speak to the people, to the consternation of her aunt and the other ladies, Elidore flung herself on



"Elidore flung herself on his breast."

his breast, clasping him round the shoulders with her arms. I should say it *would* have been to their consternation, for whatever they said afterwards, talking it over, they cannot have had much time to feel or

think. Edric's dagger at once flashed at the Prince, but found his sister's shoulder in the way. Egbert was not especially tall, and Elidore's shoulder just well covered Edric's mark. His dagger was short, or the slight stab the Prince got through his living shield would have reached his heart. This takes long to say. It seemed at the same moment that Edric was on the ground, felled by the fist of Brimont, who, instantly shouting, "In the King's name, my prisoner!" stood over him with a drawn sword, thus saving his miserable friend from the crowd, who, as soon as they got wits enough together to see what was done, or rather to believe their Prince and their dear young Lady Elidore dead together, rushed at him. But Brimont's sword stopped them. The wretched man escaped with his life for the time at least. Brimont led him off, unresisting, and weeping like a child. It seemed as if the evil spirit had left him. Maybe for that his sister had been ordained to shed her blood, and help to save him. It had been all the work of a moment with her, so sudden and swift had the attack been. The ladies carried her off, the

Prince remaining to quiet the people, who, repenting that they had let Brimont stop them, would have rushed off after Edric again had the Prince left the ground. And there were not enough with Brimont to have saved him.



C H A P T E R I I I.

THE PRINCE'S COUNSEL.

ELIDORE's hurt was not dangerous, and the Prince was soon able to see her. And you must bear with the silly girl if, just as she always did what she liked, so now she said exactly what she thought. All the people of her country, I told you, when they *did* say a thing, always said it out right in plain words, and not cloaked in phrases. Elidore only carried this national trait a step farther. She always *did* say the thing. And the Prince was compelled to meet the child with equal plainness, advising her as her father might have done.

"Well, Elidore," he was saying, "we must have a grand wedding as soon as you are yourself again."

"A wedding, my lord!"

"Yes—Brimont and you have earned one another now, if not before."

"My Prince! you know you are my first, my only love."

"First, but not only; that is your mistake, Elidore. I want you to see this."

"My first must be my only, my liege. First is last with me. They call me a wild flighty girl, but I never forget."

"Flighty you are, but not as they mean; you fly high and nobly;" and he kissed her pale hand. "But we must walk as well, and you shall *walk* to church with Brimont, for the people will be mad to see you all along the road."



"Advising her as her father might have done."

“I wish I had died for you, and then you could not be so cruel.”

“It is you that are cruel to Brimont, dear—confess you love him.”

“Love old Brim!—who could help it, honest old fellow!—but not as I love you.”

“Not as you love me? We will come to that—but you allowed him to think you could love him.”

“Ah! that was my mistake—my fault; Edric was urging me, and my love to you was not awake. As soon as it awoke, I knew it had been first, though sleeping, and I told Brimont so, but——”

“Well?” asked the Prince.

“He will not believe it.”

“Then *he* is wrong, Elidore. Your love for me ought to be first. I know,” the Prince went on with a pang in his face, “that for me my people must come first, and my own Egbert’s heart second. I must hold the Prince ever ready for them, and let Egbert get what life—or death—can afford him afterwards. I am no better than you, but I stand to you for the king and for the good of all the people. And you

must love that first before your own good. Your own good is Brimont."

"Egbert, my love——"

"Not Egbert your love—say your prince, your liege, and I will not contradict you. I will show you I am right. When did your love for me wake, Elidore?"

"The day the king fainted, and you stood out to speak to the people."

"The first time I stood in the king's place, do you see—and what did I say?"

"You said, 'My father is old, but the king is young in him. He bids me say that he will ride to the war himself.' And then they cheered, but it seemed to me——"

"Go on, Elidore; I think we are coming to it."

——As if they were cheering you rather than him.
My heart leapt to see you so noble."

"You see, Elidore, your love did not wake among the myrtles, or at the cooing of poor Isabel's dove—it was only when I stood out for the king that your heart leapt."

"But you have always been the same to me."

"To you, yes, Elidore, as my playmate and sister, but not the same to the people. That day made a change to the people, and you, as one of the people, felt it. *I* was only one of the people before," and here the Prince sighed; "but now you must separate, as I have to separate, the Prince from the man."

"Why do you sigh? you do love me as a man, then."

"I must be plain, Elidore. I love you as a sister, and as one of the people; and you love me as the Prince and as your brother—there is no more on either side. Believe me, care makes me wise when I should be foolish. But I feel the love between Prince and people *is* a passion."

"Then you should have felt the same to your father as king. Did you?"

"Hardly; but being always with the dear old man, without any break, from a child, I hardly had the opportunity. You had the opportunity. I had been away a month, you know, with the king at the sea."

"A month! what is that?"

"Much, when the heart of the whole dear little land was waking and leaping, as you say, to war. Then we had not long lost Isabel, and Edric had left you, and much was changed, as you will see, if you think quietly."

"That I never can do."

"You will see that the dove was not the proper messenger for the new love, nor the myrtle the proper token. You know well, Elidore, that you had promised Brimont that the myrtle should not be plucked till you wore it at your wedding!"

"But I told him my mistake."

"And you say he will not believe you. I know his head is rather thick—good luck for me. Elidore, I promised him never to tell a soul, but you are one soul with him. He did the same thing twice that you lately did for me."

"But you both told me that, if anything, it was the other way. Brim said that first, and of course I thought it was his modesty. But he said, 'Ask the Prince,' and I asked you, 'Did Brimont save you as

people say,' and you answered, 'Just the other way, I am proud to say.'"

"So it was, Elidore. I *am* proud to say it; I *am* proud of being the only man besides your brother who knows enough to reverse the common account. They say he put his head in the way of the axe in the night attack, and then carried me off the field in the fog. It was just the other way. He picked me up at night, and *afterwards* stopped the axe in the fog."

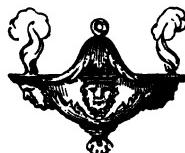
"Then where is the cut?"

"Cut! none: the man hit out into the fog. The blade would have split my head; but Brim, who was nearer the fellow, got only the staff. It was a close thing for him; his helmet was cut through at the back, and his head was scratched. But the full blow on the side of his head was only with the staff."

"Well, I did think he came back a little more stupid than he went. I see I must marry the fellow, and then he and I can be in love with you together."

"Of course you can," said the Prince; "and as Edric cannot be back, I will give you away."

Pardoned Edric had been sent to discover a new route over the mountains beyond the great swamp-land in the south. Work which was after his own heart had almost cured him; but he never came back. He could never see a rainbow without a bitter pang; and he was driven to risk himself too far on an ice-cliff. When they picked him up, his only words were—"It was for the Prince, partly;" and he died with some comfort at the last, it seemed, in thinking that his death was not all for science, but partly in the Prince's service. But this sad end occurred after the wedding.



C H A P T E R I V.

THE PRINCE'S DOOM.

I HOPE you are not disgusted with Elidore's explicitness, and her so soon yielding to the Prince's persuasion. She was but a child, you must remember, younger than the young beardless Prince, and accounted a wild, flighty girl, even in her own time and country, where the ways of people were so different from ours here and now. And the Prince was quite right. She *had* made the mistake of believing the new-found passion and joy of loyalty to the Prince was only the fuller growth of her love for the young man Egbert, and her real love for homely Brimont had seemed a weakness to be put aside with remorse. Doubtless, that remorse and pity for Brimont

helped to drive her further in the outpouring of her devotion. And that wicked quibble which Brimont and the Prince concocted between them had deceived her. Thus Brimont had fallen in her esteem. For in her heart, before the war, she had believed him to be, what he really was, a fearless, devoted soldier after her own heart—a man of deeds if not of words. Only in that view—that view fully—was he worthy of her worship. Where she could not worship she would never marry—of that she was sure. But now Brimont had come back with no brave deeds—in fact, it was all the other way. The Prince, whom he ought to have guarded with his dear life, had had to save *him*. She was mortified. But Egbert, you see, set her right on both points, and her heart, released from its vexing mistake, went back to its proper love quietly for once, possibly because it owned such a quiet master.

And now we must come to the Prince's side of the question. When he said of himself that he loved Eliodore as a sister and as a subject, no more, he was speaking the truth. But he could not have carried

his denial an inch further. There *had* been a budding of love for his sweet little black-haired playmate, his sister's dearest friend. But that bud he had sternly nipped at once and for good. I did not say *for ever*. It is not so easy to answer for that, is it? But it was honestly *for good*. And in the strength which came with that the Prince was helped. It was for honour and duty's sake first, because he saw Brimont loved the girl, and guessed she would soon love him in return. But was it right for him, being a prince and future king, to be thus self-sacrificing? Ought not, on his own showing, the good of the king, which is that of all, to have come before that of even his dearest friend? Ought he not to have claimed a noble bride? Possibly, though, you would hardly have loved Egbert so well had he reasoned thus logically. But—and here was the bitter pinch—it was yet more for the sake of princely duty than for his friend's sake that he yielded her so easily. This I must now explain; and mind, I can neither explain the explanation, nor undertake to defend what the Prince did. It was strange, and stranger was to

follow. And the right and wrong the Prince had to feel out for himself, like other young men.

A year before our story begins, his father's infirmity, the impending war, the death of his sister, and the dimly budding love for Elidore, were all working together in the poor Prince's heart. Egbert was not a perfect model by any means. Maybe he needed rousing to the duties of life. Maybe, when roused, he found much to repent of. Anyhow, sleeping after a late watch of deep thought, he dreamed the following words—whether spoken to him or by him he could not tell—

Woe to the kingdom, bitter woe,
If Egbert woo not the lips of snow ;
Bitterest woe of all is this,
If any but snowy lips he kiss——

and then, mingling, as dreams will, there followed some nonsense about “hair like the foxglove-bloom,” which seemed to come in as another mark of his destined snow-lipped bride. No more could he recollect; but the four lines I have written down

came sharp and clear, and were remembered perfectly in their sad sternness. He could recall nothing at all before the warning. It seemed to come waking him out of dead sleep. He sprang up, and, strangely enough, as he looked out of his window to the south, the snowy mountains gleamed white in the sun, and over them floated a morning cloud of the peculiar rosy purple of the foxglove-blossom. Nearer were the mists of the broad swamp-land which lay, as I said, between his city and the mountains which made the southern frontier of his realm.

And what was the effect of this startling dream, and the coincidence which seemed to stamp it as something more than natural, on an eager young spirit girding itself, somewhat too tightly, for new duties and burdens, just ready for something heroic and out of the common? The thought of devoting himself for the kingdom was just one he would jump at. But to what was he to devote himself? Did the snow-lipped bride and the warning against rosy lips denote that he was doomed to a single life? Or—the thought crossed him with a shudder as he looked on the deadly swamp-

land, from which the south wind, however, very seldom blew—was *Death* the icy bride whom he must woo and win for the people's good? Death, pictured in battle, would have given him no horror, but there was something ghastly in the thought of the shrinking kiss to be given to those pallid lips. But, in any case, what could be the sense of “foxglove hair”? Had he been sleeping with open eyes, and seen the white hills and purple cloud as he lay, and had some sudden voice prompted the dream? But he found that part of the landscape could not be seen from his pillow. No, he came to the conclusion that it was a real ghostly warning; and without ever inquiring whether it were good or evil, a guidance or a temptation—without telling it to anyone—without even a prayer that he might be led right, this wilful and secret young man settled the matter perfectly, as he thought, by kneeling down then



“Kneeling down then and there.”

and there, and making a most solemn and binding vow that he would give himself up for the kingdom, to kiss none but snowy lips, to woo no bride but her, whoever she might be, of the lips of snow, and with hair like the foxglove. And he vowed to seek and win the strange bride, or die, within three years.

All this was very heroic and picturesque to his mind; and for half the day he felt several inches taller, a worthy peer of whatever saintly or crusading kings had ever been heard or read of in that far-off land. But, by-and-by, several disagreeable thoughts and questions would come creeping in. What would his father say? The heir to the throne in that land could not at all events marry without his father's permission, and the people's consent was thought desirable, though not absolutely necessary. Their kings and princes-royal did not marry foreign princesses, but subjects; and it was accounted best for the king, who had to be the father of all, to take to wife a daughter of the common people, one of their homeliest stock, who knew all their needs and sufferings, and might, more-

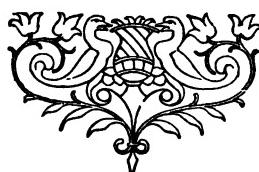
over, make his children of one blood with the commons. True, his father was so old and weak that Egbert would soon be practically king, and he had consulted his father very little of late. But he had taken this vow without a word with anyone, priest, or layman, or councillor of state, or even his sensible, matter-of-fact friend, Brimont.

That brought to mind what he had often heard about his father. When I told you that the old king's only son was very young, you would guess that his father married very late. And so it was. The good king had been very unmanageable on that point. His ministers had to urge him long and hard before they could get him to marry at all. Perhaps, had they let him alone, he might have married somewhat sooner. Anyhow, his choice fell on an only daughter, and Egbert was the sole result. When I tell you that the old king had no brothers or sisters, you will say that the royal family was in a very bad way as to prospects of permanence. Should this line fail, the throne would pass by inheritance to a very unpopular second cousin of Egbert's, who was, to every-

body's great joy, travelling far away. But all knew that the merest scent of the inheritance would have brought him back post haste from the South Pole ; and Egbert knew very well that, if this cousin were left heir, something more than a difficulty would arise with the people, who were, as you know, very downright in their likes and dislikes. And such difficulty as to the succession would be the sure pretext for interference on the part of the powerful neighbour, who was even then preparing for war upon another quarrel. This impending attack Egbert's people hoped to beat off ; and they did, as we know. But what if, by-and-by, the same enemy should find the country divided by the probable opposition to the cousin's claims ?

The consideration of all these facts made Egbert feel very uncomfortable. He knew very well what matter-of-fact Brimont would have said—"Why, man" (they were old friends, and Brim never could be taught manners), "your first duty is to marry as soon as possible, else we may have Oscar, the cousin, back some day, and a pretty business there would be. He is as obstinate and greedy as a pig; strong as a wild

boar, too, and sure to outlive you. You are not strong, and want a good wife to take care of you." All this would not have come out at once, but bit by bit. And Egbert felt every bit would have been true.



C H A P T E R V.

THE PRINCE LIVES AND LEARNS.

ALL this was before the war. The war and its dangers brought home to him the fact that he was at present the last link in a chain on which hung the happiness of the nation. Then came Edric's mad attempt on his life; and what the loss of that life would be, he realised more than ever, as he saw the avenging crowd only stayed by the king's name, and the sight and words of the Prince, safe from danger. And though that bud of love for Elidore was so promptly nipped, and her happy marriage sealed the thing, it had given him a taste of what might be in store for him. So altogether there hung over him an uneasy feeling that his life was wrecked by that rash vow, which, however, he never dreamt of

breaking. It seemed to him a thing done for ever, that could by no possibility be recalled. And even could it have been recalled, it is a question whether he could have shaken off the weight of that strange warning. So no wonder that, when I first showed him to you, he was sad. And he was to be sadder before long.

But first he was to see the light and feel the warmth that was shut out from his life. Perhaps you may have gathered, from what has gone before, that the private life of the king and princes-royal hardly differed at all from that of their subjects. Palaces and such like belonged to the nation for the king's public use. For the man who was burdened with kingship, the retirement of home-life was thought to be more needful than for others. And the king could, nay, often did, without any unsuitableness, wed any lady from the humblest family.

So when, on a lonely hunting expedition in a distant part of his realm, Egbert made the acquaintance of a poor priest's slender, golden-haired, grey-eyed daughter—Amethyst—he might, but for the

sad decree to which he had consented, have found his mate. He was not in his prince's dress, for princes were not always expected to give an account of themselves. And he was not known by sight in that district. So when, in his solitary wanderings, he became the priest's guest for a night, neither host nor hostess had any suspicion of his rank. The hostess was young Amethyst, an only child, who lived alone with her widowed father. In that country, very wisely, priests were always allowed to marry. Possibly Amethyst pitied the sad young man, or possibly she was disposed to let a little of a certain freakish woodland nature come out. Else why was she so manifestly raising, from behind Egbert's back as she waited on him, that ill-suppressed smile in her father's face as he sat opposite? That brown, dark-bearded face was to Egbert's observant eye too dangerous a tell-tale mirror of the daughter's mirth. And why, offering the Prince some nuts, did she ask whether he could crack them with his teeth, promptly showing him the example? And why did she offer him the awkward present of a young hedgehog that

day found in the garden, and, when the Prince pointed



"The awkward present of a young hedgehog."

out the difficulty of carrying it, suggest that she could cut off the points of the prickles? Certain it is that

he was cheered by her quaint, squirrel-like ways. And when, after a long talk with the fatherly priest on matters too sacred to be here set down, Egbert lay down and fell asleep watching the shadow on the curtain of a tree that waved across the moonlight, his kingdom and his troubles seemed no longer burdens, so near and warm round him was gaiety and sweet-ness, and fatherhood human and divine.

Nor was the morning less cheering; a dove like Isabel's cooed in the ivied porch, and, at his going, the slender, fair girl broke off for him three sprays of the white jasmine of that land, larger and sweeter than ours, and, guiding her father down the garden walk by the cords of his girdle as by reins, leaned over his broad shoulder to wish the wanderer a pleasant day's walk. As the Prince looked back, she seemed a pliant wild rose leaning on an oak. What more he saw on his travel needs no record. Only somehow, as he walked, the sweet girl's innocent face and figure seemed to melt into his thoughts of self-sacrifice, and he sang to himself—

“Amethyst sunlight kissed,
Glowing with a purple ray—
Ne’er more bright than when red light
Ends the tearful stormy day :
Such is true love’s constant way.”

This was a scrap from a fortunately forgotten poem of his on precious stones; and ill-suited as anything “stormy” or “tearful” seemed to the bright creature he had left behind, it seemed in a way to appropriate her and link her to his sad fate.

You will not greatly wonder to hear that ere long Egbert found opportunity to slip off royalty, with the green and silver, and hide himself again in the woodland ways that led to the priest’s quiet home. Had he bethought him to let the priest know of his trouble about the dream and the vow, it is more than possible that he might have been happily relieved of some of his heroic gloom, and have found himself, not “sadder and wiser,” but wiser and merrier. But they two talked only of matters far greater and higher—needs and hopes to which the Prince’s own troubles seemed small; so that he felt

at the same time glad to have sorrow to share with



"She stood, framed in the ivied porch."

mankind, and guilty in having any self-made, unhealthy sorrow to sever him from them.

And what of Amethyst? As she stood, framed

in the ivied porch, with the dove on her shoulder, as Isabel's used to sit—behind her the trim square garden the priest had fenced from the wild—the shaven turf and scarlet flowers making a background to the blue-clad figure in the ivied arch—the head surrounded with a halo of stray golden hair wild from the open air, she seemed to the admiring Prince like a saint in a church window. Whether saints in church windows did ever in this world crack nuts with their teeth, or crop hedgehog's prickles, the Prince did not inquire. Whether he attempted to argue that lips of snow signified saintly purity, will never be known. But it is sad to relate that he had not stayed many days in the priest's house before he, by actual experiment, assured himself that Amethyst's lips were, if cool and sweet, not exactly of the temperature of snow. These trials, like many scientific experiments, were dangerous in more ways than one. The second time, Amethyst marked the far-away look that the now fully awakened inner trouble brought into his face, and asked him, "What were you thinking of?" "Of you," he answered; for which downright lie he suffered

bitter remorse. Yet was it not true, after all? for, though far away with his trouble, was he not thinking of it in relation to her? And if he kissed her again, in a roundabout hope that he would make her love him, so that her love should conquer fate, was his instinct very far wrong? But the trouble surged up into his heart, and Amethyst dared not offer him nuts or hedgehogs that day. Next morning, though the sunlight was sweeter than ever on the scarlet flowers and the trim lawn, and though the priest pressed him to stay, he went away in gloom and blackness, deepened by a feeling that, in his unspoken mind to win Amethyst's love he had betrayed the good man's hospitality. What the good man would have said to the kisses it is impossible to tell. He loved the young man with a fatherhood which he seemed to bring down from heaven, and it was partly under a sense of this fatherly love that the young man had let his heart play. As to Amethyst, what she thought and felt is still less easy to imagine. What do church-window saints and wood-squirrels think of kisses? And Amethyst was an innocent,

merry child, living with her father among the simple peasant people, hunters and woodmen, to whom he ministered. That she loved the young man is certain. It was natural and usual for her to love persons and things in their several degrees and places. Whether she knew what degree and place Egbert had taken in her heart—taken so naturally and as a matter of course—is a question. Probably not.

But, meanwhile, Egbert was walking wearily, oppressed with mingled feelings that you will now easily understand. At last he could walk no longer, and, turning aside among the trees that bordered the road, he threw himself on the mossy grass, and sent up a great cry to his Father. But still he would not simply pray and leave his troubles at God's feet as an open question. Still he persisted in keeping the question closed, fiercely and solemnly renewing his vow to devote himself to the death for his people, and praying that he might be allowed to die for them. Only there was this difference, that now he made no mention of the warning or of the snow-lipped bride. Things had strangely altered now within him, and

that dream and vow, the source of his present troubles, seemed a thing of the past. But the troubles were present. The river that flowed from that source was fuller than ever. Not at all cheered, not at all comforted, he rose up from the moss and went on his way. As evening grew darker, the battle went on within him. He walked all night, and as the sun rose he reached the city. The air had become close and warm; a wind had set in full from the south. Over the white mountains floated a rosy purple cloud, the colour of the foxglove-bloom. As it floated nearer in the sky, a thin white vapour came from the swamp. It was the dread pestilence. Before evening the first victim was lying dead. This was a soldier who had served bravely in the war, and the Prince bent over the body. At the strange exceeding whiteness of the lips, a horror came over his heart. The woe had fallen. His betrothed bride had come to claim him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PESTILENCE.

THIS chapter must be short. Why should we dwell on horrors? The next night was warmer and more reeking. Another and another and another victim was struck. And deeper went the agony into the Prince's heart. For his unfaithfulness, he deemed, the people were being smitten. He could keep silence no longer. In the morning, he sought an aged priest in the church, and poured out before him his sorrow. What counsel or blessing the priest gave was one of the many secrets of the old man's office. It is likely that the Prince learned that his sin—if indeed this visitation had any relation to it—lay deeper and further back than in kissing and loving a sweet girl—lay rather in his own pride and wilfulness. On the other hand, it is possible

that the priest could not, any more than Egbert, define the nature and meaning of the dream warning. Whether the priest considered it a guidance or a temptation will never be known. In either case, it is



"Another and another victim was struck."

certain that he had no magic charm for removing the Prince's troubles. Nay, it was a time for weeping, and fasting, and prayer before the altar. Weeping, and fasting, and prayer seemed all in vain. But as the hours went on, and the death-roll grew and grew

faster, Egbert thought less of his mechanical vow and self-judged unfaithfulness—thought more of Heaven's wider and larger purposes and ways, of which he had heard from Amethyst's father. And, in what thought and prayer he could spare for himself, it was rather of his virtues that he repented, than of what he had judged as sins. Herein lie things that cannot be told on this page. Suffice it that he had strength from on high. If indeed the pestilence were his fated bride, right ardently he courted her.

Through those dreadful four days and nights, he was to be seen everywhere and in everything. If he slept or ate, none knew when or where. He served the priests with the youngest acolytes in their solemn services of prayer: he met them by sick-beds. Whatever means were known or thought of in that land and time for staying the pestilence, he was foremost in carrying them out. It was thought well to light a line of fires between the city and the swamp. At this task the Prince did the work of three. But—and perhaps here was a remnant of his wilful self-sacrifice—he found most rest in tending closely on the

dying. Yet the white-lipped bride could not be won. The proverb, "faint heart never won fair lady," was here reversed—this deathly lady was foul and terrible; a faint heart would certainly have won her, but the Prince secretly sought her and longed for her, so how should he fear her? But neither did Elidore fear her. Yet she was taken. In and out among the sick and dying had she gone, till Brimont brought her home by force, but too late. The brave girl had won her crown. And if the long grey church may be found, there will be seen her marble figure, with the dove and the myrtle wreath—the Prince, in tenderness, would not suffer Edric's dagger to be sculptured among the emblems. And on her face the sculptor, a priest who stood by her as she died, tried to shape that look of unspeakable triumph with which the wild "flighty" girl achieved her last flight of self-sacrifice, dying for that of which her Prince-hero was the symbol—"the good of all the people." Her last words were a prayer for the Prince; and, through the rest of that fearful time, Brimont followed the Prince dumbly like a dog.

And the old king? After the pestilence had well

begun, none ever saw him out of doors. He did not die, but was marked for death, not by the plague, but by the shock and sorrow of the thing. (The queen had been dead long before our tale begins.) Upon Egbert, thenceforth, lay all the weight of the kingdom. And how heavily it pressed, who can measure? "The heaven for height, the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable."

On the fifth day the wind changed, and no more were stricken, though some died. By the sixth day, all the funerals were over, and the city breathed again. It was only the city that had suffered. But had the whole city together suffered as much agony as had rolled over the Prince? It cannot be known. We can only repeat, "the heaven for height, the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable."



CHAPTER VII.

FRESH ALARMS.

HEAVEN'S ways are not as ours. Night and day had prayers gone up at the altar of the long grey church. And what answer? The pestilence was stayed, and a healthy north wind sent fresh bracing life into man's veins. But at the same time, through the land ran a rumour, on the northern frontier, whence that very wind was blowing, that the hated Prince Oscar had appeared, and appeared with an army. Had he scented death, and come back, as men said he would, for the spoils? This had to be seen. What was to be done?

No time was to be lost. The army was coming on apace, marching, it was said, in perfect order, and doing no jot of harm, but making swiftly and straight for the capital. The Prince's resolution was

soon taken. He would ride alone to meet his cousin. "If," said he, "Oscar comes in peace, I may well meet him alone; if in war, or half-prepared for war, he will surely be shamed into at least an open declaration of his purpose. Our brother he is at all events, and he shall see no sword drawn against him till he compels it." This seemed good to the council, and the Prince prepared to ride to meet his cousin.

And here I must tell you something of what made Oscar so hated and suspected. It is soon told. He was "obstinate and greedy," a hard landlord, who yet professed to take the people's part, and against the king, and more than once would fain have made trouble. But, happily, no one would trust him. The worst and most conspicuous of all his faults was just what made the part of a patriot impossible to him, even had there been any oppression except on his own estates—he lived the life of a very selfish bachelor. Crime had never been imputed to him. It did not fit with his cautious, cunning nature. Perhaps if he had been guilty of positive crime, the people would have hated him less.

He had found it prudent to leave the country, and had gone on a scientific expedition, for he was a great naturalist. He went almost alone, and nothing was known of his movements. Only it was certain that his explorations and researches would be far better managed, and far more successful, than were poor Edric's. Whence he had now come, and whence obtained his army, could not be guessed. Probably the army was small, though report had made it formidable. What really looked ugly was that the northern frontier could only be entered through the territories of the Prince's old enemy, the Emperor who was watching his opportunity and pretext to renew the war, and reduce Maritania (so were King Claude's dominions named) to a vassal kingdom. It therefore appeared that this inroad was made with the Emperor's consent. And this, I say, looked ugly.

And uglier still was the rumour that reached the Prince in his chamber, hastily attiring for his ride. The troops, at least some of them, were in the Emperor's uniform. Was it so true that ill news flies apace? Had the Emperor seized this dismal oppor-

tunity to invade the kingdom, dethrone Egbert, and set up cousin Oscar as his own protégé and vassal? The question would only admit of one answer. But that Yes no one had dared to speak. It was so fearfully sudden and swift. The vulture could not fly straighter to the scent of death than this pair of enemies. Oscar most hated, the Emperor most dreaded, had come to her at the moment when Maritania was so fearfully smitten. For the city was *the one great city* of the land. A pestilence there meant a pestilence among almost the half of the nation's population there collected. Small and few were the other scattered towns and hamlets. Yes, the heart and head of the nation was stricken. Ministers of state, nobles, officers of the army (the land had no sea-coast, and no navy), were among the dead.

It was well that Oscar could not hear the curses that were showered on the dastard kinsman, who could come in with the help of a foreign enemy at such a time. As for the Emperor, it is not too much to say that the people's heart was grieved for him. Though not acknowledged as a feudal head or over-

lord, he was honoured as a greater monarch, and honoured as a noble foe. It is true that all knew, as I said, that he was seeking pretext and opportunity to attack Maritania. But all acknowledged some justice in his claims. It was true that a former king had done homage to a former emperor. And it was the old king's blunt refusal to make the slightest and most formal acknowledgment of allegiance that had provoked the war. But that the Emperor should have sunk so low as this—to take such a cowardly advantage of the nation's disaster and Oscar's treachery—this was a grief bitter to be borne.

But there was no time to be lost in sentimental grief for the Emperor's dishonour. No need to give orders for preparation for battle. Had Oscar heard the trampling of men and horses, the clanking and hammering which made all through that dark day an accompaniment to the curses poured upon his name, it is probable that even his iron selfishness would have quailed. Well, another day, and he would be within more than hearing. Many a sword was sharpened and bow seen to with a fierce chuckle.

And Egbert must be off in hot haste, or he could not carry out his plan of going alone. Not even his command could keep back the army in which all his surviving male population was fast filling the ranks. The machinery was all but perfect, and now it worked of itself. But Egbert, though he could not stay his army, could be before it by half-a-day at least.

When that last rumour reached him in his chamber, all he said was, "Brimont, keep them back if you can—let me save the last chance of peace," and he was out and mounted and off. As he rode out of the city gate, dead Isabel's white dove lit on its accustomed place on his shoulder, and pressed its little head against his cheek. Who can tell what mingled thoughts rushed through the Prince's fevered brain? "Poor Isabel, she was drowned just after Oscar went away. He whom we hate comes back, but Isabel, whom I would give half my kingdom to see"—and, with a craving for some comfort, he thrust the dove into the breast of his green tunic, giving it first a kiss for Isabel's sake. "That does not break my vow," he thought; "the dove is as white as Isabel's soul, and her lips would be white

enough, poor girl." Then he thought of the last kiss he had given Elidore five days ago ; neither had that, alas, broken the letter of his vow ; scarcely whiter and colder would the lips of the marble figure be. "Yes," he thought, "she shall be carved in marble, and I may kiss her lips in marble ; Elidore, my more than sister, was her sad fate the meaning of the dream ?"

This fresh disaster had thrown him back on the dream and the vow, from which he had half grown or shaken himself free. Then he thought of Brimont's mute devotion to him after Elidore's death, and his heart went back to the honest soldier whom he had left to keep the city in hand as it became an army. Then the people's anger when they thought the Prince was slain by Edric—all these things whirled through his mind, and a wild hope dawned that he might now be riding to his death for the people. And he crossed himself with a glimmer of comfort. Then he disturbed the dove to pull at a silver chain, which brought out a miniature of one girl, at all events, whom he could love with no gainsaying. Elidore was another's, even in death. Amethyst—his only thought of her was an

inward dumb sob; but Isabel, his own blood—his sister—no dream, no vow, not heaven or hell could alter his rights in her. And he kissed the portrait thrice, then looked at it; and what did he see? A half-length portrait of a girl about his present age. Isabel had been two or three years his elder. Seemingly a short figure, in black, with no royal gold or jewels, but a bunch of wild daffodils in the waistband. This had been painted for him by the court artist after her death.

On the morning before the fatal excursion with Elidore on the treacherous river, Egbert had seemed sad—perhaps with some foreboding of what was to come. And Isabel in high spirits had tried to amuse him by showing him a new dance she had learned from the countrywomen on Oscar's domains. Isabel was almost the only one who could see any good in Oscar, and had stood his friend more than once.



His Sister's Portrait.

Oscar's domains were a semi-independent duchy, which had remained neutral during the late war—a force not to be despised, into whichever scale it might throw its weight. You may ask how it was that a mighty emperor needed any help at all to conquer this tiny kingdom. The answer is simple. That was only one of his enterprises. He had trouble enough on his hands on his more distant frontier—trouble and war with which we have nothing to do, save to state that it just left him free to fight Maritania with his left hand only. And his left hand had been almost too strong for both of Egbert's. But Oscar's domains, I was going to say, lay beyond those snowy mountains of which Egbert could never think without a shudder. And beyond Oscar's dominions lay the sea. Duke Oscar was not churl enough to refuse some hospitality to his royal relatives. It was to his shores that Egbert and the old king had gone for the former's health, and it was in his domains, ruled almost as harshly by Oscar's sister as by himself, that Isabel had learned the dance which, with laughing eyes, she was showing Egbert the morning of her

death. The face—but where was the dove? As these memories coursed through Egbert's mind, the disturbed bird had risen into the air, and, refusing now to return to his whistle, wheeled thrice aloft. "It is returning to Isabel's room, poor thing, where Elidore used to feed it," thought the Prince. But no; it darted forward, and disappeared beyond a line of tall trees far before him.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE ENEMY.

IF much of the preceding chapter is confused, it only represents the state of Egbert's mind. Whom he passed or met on the road, what ways even he took, he scarcely knew. Three things were quite clear to him from all he had heard. The invading force was all cavalry: they were outstripping or detaining any fugitives (by what means the rumours had come was not clear), and they were swooping straight upon the capital. But already, doubtless, the flower of Egbert's cavalry were on their road behind him, in better order, and far more ready for battle under Brimont's restraining hand. Egbert's object was to accomplish his meeting with Oscar alone, and, if possible, shame him into peace. But different feelings came over him as he

saw a line of horsemen in blue—the Emperor's colours—ride out at speed from between the trees behind which the dove had plunged. As soon as they were clear of the trees—the last of a forest—they drew out in rank, and Egbert saw that their numbers were very small. But doubtless these were only the advanced guard! Soon he distinguished a tall man on a great horse, a tall man in *light* green, the colour worn by the Royal Dukes of the Shore. Seeing his enemy—the traitor cousin—plain before him, among the foreign allies, Egbert's thoughts turned to fury; he drew his sword, and was riding madly forward to cut down his cousin and die, when

“ May ! May ! May !
The fresh and flowering day,
The hawthorn’s scent, where’er we went,
Heavily filled the air ;
Look o’er the land, on either hand,
The hawthorn flower was there !”

The enemy had halted in line, and this old melody of Isabel’s rang out clear and sweet on a single trumpet. Before the second line was ended, the Prince had

reined in his horse in amazement and stood motionless, as the well-known words—his own, to which in old days Isabel had made the tune—framed themselves in his mind to the clear, sweet notes. And while he stood, the sun broke out of the grey clouds that had veiled all the day hitherto, and fell full on the enemy's ranks. Who was that at Oscar's left—a small figure in black, on a small horse, unnoticed hitherto? His heart beat and his head swam; but he seemed to distinguish a speck of white on the shoulder, and a dash of yellow seemed—there was no mistake—and the dress was a woman's! He nearly fell from his horse with deadly faintness. It all came back to him, how the two girls had gone on the water together; how Elidore had sprung ashore—so she said—for violets; how the boat had turned over and drifted with the rapid current, and how the body had never been found; and how this was soon after Oscar's departure. But without knowing it, he had spurred his horse forward, and the most terrible minute of his life came to its end, as he saw, clear and close, the black dress, the daffodils in the girdle, the short round face, with the

level, straight brows, the long braided brown hair, and above, a brown fur cap, with a single great topaz, his own gift of old. The next he knew, he had lifted his sister from her saddle, placed her on his horse before him, and was looking into those clear light-brown eyes. The blue-clad horseman, his cousin, the daffodils, and the dove which had marked its old mistress—all vanished clean away. He saw nothing but that moth-like, dusky face.

By very slow degrees other objects returned, and he saw two riderless horses before him: one black and small—his sister's; the other white, high, and bony—that was Oscar's. And where was Oscar? Beside Egbert's horse stood, quietly waiting till he should come back from his trance, a tall big man in light green and silver, a man with a middle-aged, pale face, clean shaven, showing a firm, square mouth, short red hair, and cold grey eyes that looked on with a doubtful mingled expression. Had it been possible in Oscar, one would have said that these eyes were slightly moistened. As soon as Egbert turned to recognise him, he dropped kneeing on the grass without a word, look-

ing to Isabel to speak for him. Then at length the Prince found his tongue, and, kissing his sister for the first time, he exclaimed, "Isabel, what is this?" "*Who* is this, you mean,"—for she was quite in possession of her faculties, not being at all surprised. How should she be? *She* had known that she had been alive for these years; and as to Egbert, she had ridden this morning with the express purpose of meeting him. "*Who* is this, you mean. This is my husband since yesterday. He asks your pardon." "Rise pardoned, brother Oscar," said the Prince, and held out his hand to the big red-haired man, who grasped it without a word, but still stood bare-headed.

"And who are these?" asked Egbert, pointing to the little array of deferential horsemen. "Only a few gentlemen whom the Emperor has sent to take care of me, because my husband is so little"—and what a laughing, tearful light shone in the happy woman's brown eyes, and over all the dusky round face under the braided brown locks—one falling in a long curl upon the left shoulder, the dove nestling on the other. "Only a few gentlemen! Sirs"—he went on saluting

them—"you are trespassers, but welcome; you have given us a pretty fright."

"And you were ready, I doubt not, to give us a pretty fight."

This came from a small, swarthy, bright-eyed man,



"Now rise, Sir Prince."

who rode next to Oscar's horse. Egbert lifted Isabel to her saddle, and, springing from his horse, he uncovered himself and knelt on *both* knees (which absolutely, according to the custom, settled the

question), and said two words—"My liege." The Emperor laughed—"Rise, Sir Prince; we must not take you at a disadvantage. You only see here a gentleman of your lady sister's escort. The question must be considered at your better opportunity." "My liege," replied Egbert, still kneeling, "I will not rise till my homage is accepted." "He has his father's perversity to the full," laughed the Emperor, extending with a laugh a small white hand, which the Prince kissed, and the quarrel of half-a-century, which had cost so many lives, was ended. "Now rise, Sir Prince;" and the Prince rose. "Cover yourself;" and the Prince replaced his green plumed cap. "Next time we make war upon you, we will arm ourselves with daffodils."



CHAPTER IX.

ISABEL.

“AND now,” resumed the Emperor, “we must think how to meet your people. To judge by the specimen we had just now”—smiling at the Prince, who remained standing—“it would not be wise to let your horsemen come in sight of us unwarmed. You are so sudden in your onsets, especially down this slope, that quiet gentlemen like us”—he turned laughing to his companions, among whom Egbert now recognised princes imperial and generals of the Emperor’s army whose faces, seen in battle, had escaped recognition in their simple cavalry uniform—“quiet gentlemen like us might get hurt before your knights knew we had come in peace.”

At this little speech, all smiled but Oscar and

Isabel. Up that long slope those quiet gentlemen had struggled, with the Emperor in front and their troops behind, through half a summer's day in the final battle of the war. Of course, Isabel knew nothing of this; and as for Oscar, shame sat upon him that he had held aloof from his cousin through that bitter contest.

"I will go forward and meet them," Duke Oscar said, speaking for the first time.

"That were sheer madness," rejoined the Emperor, gravely. "If I mistake not, Sir Prince, there will be mounted archers in your van, and our friend here"—half turning to the Duke—"might never get a hearing." "You must pardon us, Sire," replied the Prince; and the Emperor smiled to himself, for Egbert's new loyalty was carrying him farther than was prudent, considering that he had the nation to reckon with. "Pardon us, Sire, but we thought *your* attack was sudden, and could afford to spare no advantage."

"No more, Sir Prince, Duke Oscar cannot go; besides, we want him with us, there is much to explain. Let the Duchess go alone. I think she will not need

our trumpeter here to sound halt, as we did for you. Come forward, trumpeter."

Egbert recognised, in the Emperor's uniform, a young musician of his, taken prisoner in the war.

"Don't treat him as a deserter, Prince; he saved some one's life just now."

Egbert flushed, and Oscar again looked guilty and confused, like a man doing penance, as indeed he was.

"Gentlemen," the Emperor continued, turning to the escort, "you may retire."

But before they turned their horses, the Prince exchanged greetings and hand-grasps with many a brave enemy of old. So they rode away; and Isabel galloped forward, the dove on her shoulder, while the Prince mounted, and the three potentates—great and small—turned aside in grave discourse.

The Emperor was right. Not two miles off, the best of the Maritanian cavalry were advancing with steady speed—on either wing archers on light fleet horses, who would at first sight of the enemy have darted on, right and left, to dismount under any cover they could find. It would have gone hard with any

advancing column. And, furious as the people were, and traitor as they deemed him, it would have been very dangerous for Duke Oscar to approach them alone, conspicuous by his stature and his light green. But Isabel might ride on gaily, and before long she saw a long dark green line sweeping steadily down the upland to meet her. As they drew near, she could distinguish Brimont's great grey horse in front. But at the same moment she was recognised, and the grey horse and several others, ridden doubtless by the officers her friends, darted forward, and almost before she had time to identify Brimont's bluff, stolid, now slightly bearded face, she was surrounded by an eager band, who said no word, but, turning bridle, brought her back to the army, which instinctively drew round her, so that all could see and hear as well as might be.

Still no one spoke, till Isabel, looking round, asked, "Do you know me?" Her voice was soft and low, so that only those nearest heard; but as whispers passed, and the army realised that dear Lady Isabel was there alive, and waiting to be recognised, such a roar of welcome broke out, that

the dove rose in terror from her shoulder, and Isabel, laughing, dropped whip and bridle to cover both ears with her little hands. “I am answered,” she said, and again her words passed along and back, and a second roar was rising, when, by waving her hand, she requested silence.

“Brothers,” she called out distinctly, and then she was compelled to wait till the thunder had passed—Oscar heard it afar, and a proud thrill mingled with his downcast shame—“Brothers,” she began again, and this time all waited eagerly on her words, “I am come to bring, if I may, some comfort in your sorrow——”

No thunder this time, but here and there fell a drop of rain; Brimont’s cheeks were not dry.

“And then to ask your leave to get married!” This was added with a quaint little bend of entreaty; and as her words were gleaned, a tumultuous din arose, among which she caught the words, “Ay! Duke Oscar if you will.”

“Thank you,” she said, laughing, “I will never marry Oscar, but I see we understand one another

—I have your free consent to marry whom I will.”
Another confused but friendly uproar.

“That is well, for I grieve to confess”—and the little lady covered her face with both hands, then joining them in a pathetic attitude of pleading—“I was married yesterday. O Brim!” Wicked little actress—she looked round to greet him for the first time—“O Brim!”

Isabel turned unnecessarily to offer him her left hand, which he kissed in silence, the tears now running unrestrained down his cheeks, as he remembered old days with Elidore. Then she moved her little black horse, and shook hands—if that little moth-like thing could be called a hand—with all the officers, many of them her friends; and then, turning to the army again, she cried, “Brothers, I have not hands enough—take these;” and, plucking the huge bunch of daffodils from her girdle, she scattered them as far as she could.

When the disorder occasioned by all this joy had subsided, and the flowers, torn into pieces, had been passed round as far as they would go, Isabel went

on, raising her little voice as much as she could, "When you interrupted me, Brim"—with a most dishonest emphasis on "interrupted," because she had made this diversion on purpose—"I was going to say my husband was a foreigner, but I would not marry him, though he had saved my life"—dead silence, for all hung on what was coming—"till he became a Maritanian, and made your peace with the Emperor!"

At this there was a confused noise.

"Well, since you have no cheer for the Emperor, our bulwark against the heathen of the north, whom *you* have never seen, but *I* have, and he came from battle against them to give me away yesterday; since you have no cheer for the Emperor, adieu!" and she kissed her hand to the army, and made as though to turn her bridle.

But at this very moment, amid the dead silence—



Daffodils.

for the army, you see, was baulked in hot career for battle, and the Emperor *was* an old enemy, though a noble one—amid the dead silence her dove ventured to return, gliding down from a tall tree behind her.

“Well,” she said to the soldiers, prisoning her dove to her heart with her left arm, “you have scared away peace once; will you have her now, or shall I take her with me?”

Then Brimont spoke—a longer speech than he ever made before—“Gentlemen, our dear Lady Isabel—I don’t yet know what else to call her—is wrong; I have seen the heathen.”

“And so have I,” “and I,” answered here and there from the ranks.

“You and I”—with an answering nod to those who spoke—“you and I know what they are—wolves. You are brave watch-dogs, I know; but don’t think you are a match for wolves. Look you—you are only soldiers now and then. And you are Christians, and butchery goes against the grain with you.”

"Except it's Duke Oscar," muttered a hot-headed young soldier, not so low but that Isabel heard him and turned pale for a moment; but she bravely nerved herself and said, "Go on, Brim."

And Brim went on—"Some men are fools." Then the young soldier felt uncomfortable. "Oscar's a hard man, and we haven't loved him. But I tell you what—Duke Oscar has Christian stuff in him. Wait till you have the heathen on you, killing and burning—I've seen them at it—and you'll be glad of big Duke Oscar then."

"No, no," interrupted some, but Brimont went on—

"Those who speak are just those who don't know; *I* know, and it went very much against the grain to fight the Emperor, when I knew what he is to us who lie behind him. Now we talk without our master. While King Claude, bless him"—here a deafening shout—"while King Claude lives, I suppose we must go on the old lines. Our dear lady here says our peace is made. I don't quite understand that, because it takes two to make a bargain. But if our young master Prince Egbert"—here another shout—"can see

his way to making it up, so that we should back up the Emperor and not hit him from behind, I am sure I wouldn't say nay to any homage. We all know the Emperor wants no tribute—nothing of the sort—only to be owned overlord, and followed in case of need. That's what I think, and I've said the same to Prince Egbert more than once. Now will you give a cheer for the Emperor?" And there came a shout indeed, but feeble compared with what had gone before.

"Well," said Isabel, "I won't ask too much. Will it be too much to ask one of you to lend my husband a coat? He has given up all to turn Marianian, and would like to take his place in the ranks."—"No, not yours," to the impetuous young soldier aforesaid, "you are not big enough. I want a coat for a very big bony man."

A confused murmur ran along the ranks, not unmixed with suppressed laughter, and after some stir and trampling of horses, the biggest man in the army—an old white-headed soldier—who had dismounted, now came forward in the white under-tunic

the Maritanians wore, carrying his faded green coat on his arm.

“I think, my lady,” he said, “we understand. I’m an old man. I’ve lost two sons in the war, and my only daughter in the plague, and I have learned a good deal. I agree with the general; we are brothers and Christians, and we ought to be friends. So, my lady, if this is for Duke Oscar, you are heartily welcome;” and he handed up the coat.

“Thank you,” she said, “I will bring my husband to meet you, if you will come on slowly.” And she turned her little black horse and was off, knowing that the three whom she had left would follow her at a distance.

Before long, she reappeared, accompanied by a tall man on a big white horse, such as Oscar used to ride. As they drew near, the big man dismounted, and came forward on foot, wearing the faded dark green.

“Brothers,” he said with effort, as if saying a lesson, “I stole your sister, but she would not marry me till

I made myself one of you. *My* sister is dead. Prince Egbert holds a paper giving up my duchy and lands to the Crown. And I give up any claim I may ever have on the Crown, and any claim my heirs may have, except through my wife. The Prince will provide for her in her own right. I am only a simple gentleman, if you will have me. I volunteer for the Prince's service. Will you find me a place?"

He said this very badly, like a man who could not trust himself to speak, but tried to repeat what had been put into his mouth. Then he waited for an answer.



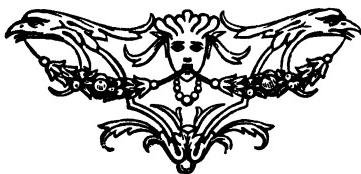
"He waited for an answer."

Half-a-minute passed, and then the old man who had given him the coat stepped forward, and turned to read his comrades' eyes, for you see this was a people's question mainly. It was the *popular* feeling that was so strong against Oscar. "Go on," "We'll have him," "Means well," or such utterances, half-spoken, he read with his eyes; then he went forward to the ex-duke. "I am an old man," he said, "and have

been looking for a substitute this year or so. Will you take my place, sir?"

And Oscar walked into the man's place, and mounting his horse, which was public property, said, "Thank you, friend; will you take my white horse as a gift?"

And *that* feud was over.



CHAPTER X.

OSCAR.

MEANWHILE the Emperor and Egbert were closing the royal conference. The two now agreed that in the people's yet uncertain state of mind it would be imprudent for the Emperor to show himself at the capital of Maritania. He was certain to be recognised, and, touchy as the people were on the point of independence, they would be ready to suspect that the Emperor had come to exercise some rights of sovereignty. This suspicion, and the jealousy thereby aroused, would endanger, if not destroy, all hopes of friendship between the two nations. So the Emperor rode back alone, promising to send the trumpeter to Egbert.

And now we must explain what had passed between the three in the first part of the conference. The

Emperor was the chief speaker, as Egbert was all in the dark waiting for information, and Oscar was, as we have seen, in a very silent mood. And much Egbert never fully understood till after many talks at different times with his sister. Putting it all together, we may briefly tell the following story :—

Isabel was, as we have said, the only one about the court who could see anything to like in Oscar. During her visits to him, she had seen that at all events he was not so black as he was painted. Of his sister, indeed, the less said the better—that she confessed—but for Oscar's self she was rather inclined to stand up. How far this liking went cannot be said. Nor can it be known whether Oscar had even then any underlying real touch of love for her. Certainly he was secretly anxious to obtain her hand ; for you must remember that Egbert's father had no brothers or sisters, nor any children but Egbert and Isabel : so that, if Egbert died childless, the crown would pass next to Isabel and her children ; and if Isabel died childless, then to Duke Oscar, Egbert's and Isabel's second cousin. Now the Duke was

fiercely disliked, while Isabel was beloved by the people. If, therefore, he could marry her, his children would have a double claim, and a claim through a highly popular mother. And if he could have won Isabel's favour, that would have been something towards his acceptance with the people.

Things stood thus when Oscar found it for other reasons prudent, as we have said, to leave the country. At least he pretended to leave it. For he was not a man to give up an end on which he had once set his mind, and Isabel's non-acceptance (for she simply dismissed the matter laughingly) of whatever overtures he made her, had provoked him more than a little. So when he had made all ostensible preparations for departure on his scientific expedition, and had indeed set sail in his yacht, he secretly returned, and was, in the disguise of a peasant, lurking near the capital, watching an opportunity to carry off Isabel. And that unlucky expedition of hers with Elidore gave him a better opportunity than he could have expected. He was in the wood by the little crooked, rapid river, watching the girls' movements ; and now

they had passed away from him, and out of sight round a bend, when he heard a confused cry for help, heard Elidore scream, and saw the boat, bottom upwards, come whirling into the most dangerous eddy of the whole stream.

Now Oscar was a sportsman and naturalist, and had studied most things. Everything might have a use some day. So it happened that he guessed just the right spot to plunge in at, holding to the roots of an oak tree, and to catch something that whirled by, dimly seen, sucked under by the current—something which proved to be Isabel.

It was a fearful place and a wonderful rescue. The girls had rowed up a quieter branch of the river, though that was dangerous enough. But the other half of the stream plunged round a corner, and eddied swiftly into a deep elbow hole with, fortunately, the projecting roots aforesaid. No eye but that of a practised fisherman and keen observer, with a thorough knowledge of the ways of eddies, would have known the place to intercept the body. Hardly any but his cool nerves could have seized the place and moment

so promptly, and it took all his strength and courage to do it with safety. Not a moment lost, he plunged into the thicket with his seemingly lifeless little burden, and made his way to the cottage of an old peasant woman, whom, by a cunning mixture of generosity and intimidation, he had made absolutely his servant. There Isabel was restored to life, but kept fast prisoner. And a night or two after, when all search was given up as hopeless, she was safely conveyed towards the border, which she passed undetected, and was given into the keeping of the Duke's sister. Fortunately the poor old woman did not live long to bear the weight of her secret. Though Oscar had of course made it worth her while to keep dead silence, and to tell any lies that might happen to be necessary, the poor old soul had a conscience ; it killed her, with only this consolation, that she had at least tended Isabel most carefully.

As for Oscar's sister, you will easily understand that she knew the extreme worth of their prize, and saw too how important it was that Oscar should, if it were possible, get Isabel to accept her captor of

her own free will. So Isabel was excellently treated, with as much liberty as was compatible with secrecy. But, unfortunately, Isabel had a spirit which would not yield, though she secretly softened more and more to the hard Duke, as she saw him try to be less hard to please her, and saw what Brimont called the Christian stuff in him come out. She could see that under his unscrupulous selfishness there *was* a heart in which remorse, and, strange to say, some real tenderness were working. But she kept all these discoveries to herself.

At last, when she had been prisoner for two years, she found means to escape. But why, you will ask, did she fly secretly to the Emperor's court, instead of going to her father and brother? Because, I believe, she really had some love, or at least pity, for Oscar, and saw that to go to her brother might mean revenge, and ruin for the Duke. Certainly she had long lamented the estrangement and dislike between Duke Oscar on the one hand, and Egbert with the Maritanians on the other; and for her to flee from Oscar to her brother and people would rouse their dislike to

hatred and anger. And Oscar, baulked in his purpose, with his guilty conscience stinging him, would not be likely to meet their anger with less bitterness. So, partly for Oscar's sake, partly for her brother's sake, altogether for peace's sake, though she knew not how, she fled to the Emperor in disguise, and only revealed herself to him and the Empress on their promise of protection and help. Doubtless the Emperor saw his interest in this.

Before long, on the scent of his escaped captive, Oscar arrived at the Emperor's court, and boldly demanded his betrothed, as he called her. The Emperor was not unwilling to help Oscar, for might he not thus secure a powerful ally for the next war against the Maritanians? But he was bound by honour and hospitality, and by his promise to Isabel. Moreover, it was important for Oscar's ends that Isabel should be left perfectly free. You may wonder how no rumour of this reached Egbert. I answer, it was all done very secretly and quickly. Isabel's arrival at the Emperor's court was not a week before the beginning of the pestilence; and that was not

a time for getting much news from without. In fact, none but a few priests, and others equally devoted, dared to enter or approach the infected city.

While that heavy blow was falling on Maritania, Isabel's fate, and with it issues of peace and war, was in the balance. The Emperor, you see, was constrained to let Isabel hold the balance with no weights but her own free will. And what did she do? Sought an interview alone with Oscar, and asked him point blank, with honest, serious eyes flashing into most beautiful mockery, like that of an escaped squirrel who should say, "I am in my oak tree now, and you daren't touch me"—

"Do you love me, Oscar?"

And all poor Oscar's schemes and contrivings were ruined. The squirrel was too much for him. Often had those low arched brows met level, that little forehead scowled sullenly, and a yellow fire flashed out of those mothlike eyes. That was the caged squirrel. But here was the squirrel at liberty in her mighty oak tree, ducking to him with spiteful grace, with a laughing light in her wicked eyes, asking him

straight out, as she threw back the long brown curl—
“Do you love me, Oscar?”

Now she had never called him Oscar before, and the whole thing was too much for him. That Christian, or perhaps human stuff, had been working in him for two years, fermenting under an icy crust, ever since he had plunged into the dark whirling pool, and carried the little wet, helpless lady to the old woman’s cottage. It had worked with remorse and shame at the ungenerous part he was playing. And new thoughts had come into his mind, as he contrasted his gentle, though sometimes sullen captive, with his own hard sister. When the squirrel stood safe and free before him, hopelessly out of his power—for he knew the Emperor would be just as much advantaged by turning against him and making merit of restoring Isabel to her brother—when she stood before him, and looked first straight into his cold grey eyes with hers so frank and honest, and then flashed with that mincing mockery, and said, laughing all over her face, but chiefly in the corners of her eyes—“Do you love me, Oscar?”—the ice was pierced. He

broke out into most violent and abominable language—at which wicked Isabel only laughed the more—and swore by everything sacred and profane that he loved her more than—“Even yourself,” interrupted



“‘You promise?’ she said.”

Isabel—and he broke out again, and would have laid hands on his tormentor to kiss her, but he saw that she kept a tight hand on the cord which could call the Emperor from where he waited out of hearing.

So he was foiled again, and had to hold his tongue while Isabel lectured him. The upshot of the whole lecture, delivered with flashing eyes, and a little pettish stamp or two for emphasis, was that he had behaved most heartlessly and disgracefully—not to her, but to Egbert, whom he ought to have helped in the war. That was his great crime—that, instead of helping his cousin, he had stood aloof in his time of need, stolen his sister, and plotted against his throne. He ought to be ashamed of himself.

And he was, but did not say so.

There was a long silence, during which she watched him narrowly out of her safe corner by the dark crimson curtain, where she stood moth-like and dusky, the everlasting daffodils in her girdle. At last he spoke.

“Look here, Isabel; give me one of those daffodils, and I’ll do anything you wish.”

Then her face flushed, for she knew her triumph was come.

“You promise?” she said.

“I do.” No violent language this time.

"Then take these, and go to the Emperor. Tell him you are Egbert's true brother through thick and thin, and remind him that you hold the sea-coast; that will settle the business."

And it did, for not only was the Shore Province, as I said, no contemptible weight in the balance, as to its population and arms; not only was its Duke known as having the coolest, cunningest head in all that part of the world—a man who stuck at nothing, and seldom failed in anything: the access to the sea—just what the Emperor lacked—was final. The Emperor knew he would be wasting strength and blood to attack Maritania again. So when Egbert did him homage, he was in his inmost soul glad to accept anything he could get, still more glad that it was given willingly when he knew he could no longer force it. The result you know.

C H A P T E R X I.

THE PRINCE'S REQUEST.

ON the day following the joyful reunion of brother and sister, a council was called in the long state hall. The Prince, wearing nothing but his usual green and silver, sat on the throne. Around him stood his father's old councillors, his nobles and the officers of the army, with many of the chief clergy; while the body of the hall, or about two-thirds of it, was filled by any householders of the people that could find room. With regard to these, I may say there was no regular election, but the younger and less experienced, by custom, yielded place to those older and better qualified to speak for their class. So the hall was filled, and many matters were gone over somewhat as follows.

First, a paper was read out, signed and sealed by

Duke Oscar—using his title for the last time—in which he gave up the duchy of the Shore, to be united with



"The Prince sat on the throne."

the rest of Maritania; with its army, navy, and mines, and whatever else belonged to it, with any revenues therefrom to him arising; and he prayed the

king to adopt him as a son for his daughter Isabel's sake, and to provide him such maintenance as was necessary.

Here followed tumultuous applause, which was silenced into eager expectation when a second document was announced, signed by the Emperor, with several of his nobles as witnesses. Therein he witnessed to the due and lawful marriage of the Princess Isabel to Oscar, Duke (as he then was) of the sea-shore. Seeing that he had presumed in some sort to arrange this marriage, and to give the bride away, he begged to be permitted to dower her with the Forest Marches. In token whereof his hand and seal, with the signatures of the witnesses.

Here still louder applause, for the Forest Marches bordered Maritania, and were doubly valuable as a frontier, and still more by their vast stores of oak and pine, now that Maritania possessed a sea-coast.

Then Egbert stood up and spoke.

"Lords and gentlemen, you are aware that the question of homage must perforce lie in abeyance till such time as my royal father recovers his health and

reason, or till—which Heaven keep far off—I succeed to his throne. But seeing the Emperor so generously minded, and our state so mightily strengthened against him, partly by his own act, are you willing to yield him such allegiance as he requires? He requires of us no tribute, nor desires to interfere with our laws nor with the succession of our kings. Only he desires that we should own him as overlord, to be obeyed for purposes of war, in case of danger from the heathen, or any other enemies who may attack us from without. Is it your pleasure to yield this hereafter by me, if I become king?"

Then many of the nobles and clergy spoke, mostly concurring; and when the people were desired to express their mind, the shout of assent was unmistakable. And the Prince spoke again.

"I am glad, my brothers, that you are mostly of one mind with me. Why I asked you this before my time was thus. You know that we have suffered a heavy visitation of Heaven, during which I did, with holy counsel, endeavour to bethink me what there was amiss in us. And the one thing appeared to me

to be our obstinate pride, both in our hatred to our brother and our war with the Emperor. So that when I met the Emperor”—here was great amazement—“bringing our dear sister alive and happy, I, without any counsel or consent, did him full homage, which he graciously accepted. If, therefore, you endorse my act, well. Should I be king, my act will come into force; but if not, then I resign my right and title to the crown, for I cannot go back from my deed.”

And this time, without waiting to be asked, the people broke out with “Long live Prince Egbert!” and “Long live the Emperor!”

When quietness reigned again, the Prince called forth Oscar, who stood in the body of the hall in the faded dark green. Oscar stepped on the dais, and, before all the people, Egbert took him by the hand and kissed him on the cheek. At this was no applause, but a low murmur of approbation, as the nation felt a weight of unnecessary enmity pass from its conscience.

Then Brimont stepped out, and, kneeling before the

Prince, requested leave to resign his office in the army. He had entered it first, he said, as a duty, at his father's wish, but had always been in his heart a man of peace. It was much to his regret that he had lately found himself, by the death of the old general, the commander-in-chief of the army. He was well aware that his rank had its duties (Brimont was related to the royal family); but if he had in any degree discharged them, he begged that, now he was under so heavy a sorrow, he might retire, and give his life to that which he had always desired, the service of the Church.

"In your sorrow," answered the Prince, "we all grieve with you, and may you find consolation. The granting of your request you and your late dear lady have nobly earned"—here he paused, and turned to the people, who shouted their assent—"but the request is a hard one, seeing we have none who can well take your place."

Then Brimont asked leave to name a substitute for the Prince's approval, which being granted, Brimont resumed.

“There is a man here present, well known for his valour and cunning in war, who has approved himself on his own account in defence of his own dominions by land and sea, both against the heathen and the Emperor—though, to our sorrow, he was not with us in the late war. It seems good, therefore, to me, and to such of the officers as I have consulted, with hardly an exception, that Prince Oscar be made commander-in-chief of the army and navy.”

Again the people were appealed to; and whether it were some virtue in the still treasured shreds of Isabel’s daffodils, or real trust in the man who, with all his faults, was known as so daring, cunning, and secret, full and unanimous assent was given. So Brimont delivered over to him the sword and baton, and, with pleasure beaming in his face, stepped aside to whisper with a grave old bishop, while some other formal matters were gone through. Then Brimont and the bishop had to cease their whispered discourse, for the Prince rose and asked silence, since he had a request to make.

All being silent, the Prince began—“My Marit-

anians, three years ago it pleased Heaven to send me—or to suffer for my trial, I know not which—a marvellous dream, which I cannot tell you as yet; and upon it I swore a solemn vow, which I ask your consent to fulfil. If I vowed anything contrary to my duty as your Prince, may Heaven bring it to nothing. But through much sorrow, which has seemed to come upon us partly through my fault—I mean this late judgment of Heaven—and through much joy"—he turned to Oscar, who stood now at his right hand—"my dream and my vow still lie upon me. Whether my mind upon it be right, I know not"—he passed his hand over his white forehead, and for the first time all the people noticed how his many troubles, outer and inner, had worn him down—"but I must leave you for a time. Will you accept Prince Oscar as Regent should my absence be prolonged, and as heir should I not return?"

And as Oscar stood before them, the tallest man on the dais, with the old cold look gone from his eyes and the cynical curl from his lip, but instead a simple, manly shamefacedness, as of a man who knows he has

done amiss, but knows he can do well hereafter, with the light of Isabel's love about him too—of course he wore the everlasting daffodils—the people shouted, “Prince Oscar for ever!” “God speed the Prince!”

And the pale Prince handed Oscar his white gold-headed wand, bowed to the nobles and people, and went out.



CHAPTER XII.

BOTANY.

OSCAR's faithfulness and loyalty had a severer test in store than he guessed ; though it *was* with some sad forebodings that Maritania saw her silent and reserved young Prince go out on a quest, the nature of which none knew but the old priest, whom he had made his confidant in the pestilence. This old priest was standing without, as Egbert came from the door by which his horse was standing ; for all had been prepared as far as could be, awaiting the people's final consent, which we have just heard given. No one from within dared follow the Prince ; only those who hung without saw Egbert exchange a few low words with the priest, who seemed to shake his head gravely, as though he did not well approve of the wilful young

man's errand. Yet he gave Egbert his blessing as he knelt before him, and waved him a kind farewell. Perhaps the good old man's wisdom was not quite sufficient to enable him to unravel the tangle which a young man's dreams and fancies made with the winding thread of Providence. Perhaps he could only give God's blessing, and leave Egbert to work out his fate for himself. Did then his words fall idle, or did angel or angels unseen go along with the Prince on his dangerous way?

Egbert rode straight for the swamp, over whose brown desolation grey carrion crows were flying by twos and threes. Probably his eyes saw more than the carrion crows, as he galloped along the raised earth-road that crossed the swamp towards the mountains. Perhaps his mind and eyes were set on the mountains, and nothing but the hooded crows crossed his field of view; anyhow, that was all he remembered afterwards. At nightfall he was at the foot of the mountains which divided the old Shore Province from Maritania, to which it was now united. And in the midst of his own secret thoughts for himself, his

princely heart swelled to think—"to-morrow I shall be in sight of *our* sea." He slept in the pinewood cabin of the last of his foresters, according to the old division. The mountains had belonged to Maritania up to the highest ridge. But there was no need for foresters where there was no forest, only shrubs dying away into upland flowery turf, and then snow all the year round. And where the forest began again, the foresters wore Oscar's light green. But the loyal huntsman who was so proud to receive his young prince wore the dark green. Egbert wore his distinguishing silver lace, but meant to put it aside in the morning. That night, after a cheerful supper by the crackling wood-fire, he slept in a tiny room, from which he could see the glimmering white peaks. He fell asleep, tossed between trust in a Father and a consciousness that he was following his own will and fancies; for you see he still clung to his vow; and even if the dream were false, and the vow a folly, who could blame him for the instinct which led him to seek the pure cold mountain air alone? Over-wrought as he had been for these three years, especially with the

disaster, joy, and excitement of the last fortnight, he felt he must follow this blind impulse, or go mad. As he lay, there came to his mind another of his boyish verses, which had returned to him in the midst of the pestilence, when he had found help in practising what his youthful lines had set forth in theory—of the just man who

“ Raised to heaven a steadfast eye,
When joy was lost, and hope was dead,—
When earth was black, and in the sky
God’s thunder crashed about his head,—
And cried, ‘He is my Father still,
Although He smite me to the dust;
Fighting for life, I work His will;
Yea, though He slay me, I will trust.””

And though distinctly conscious that he was taking his own way, and must take his chance too, he trusted and slept.

In the morning, so brightly shone the sun on the pines and on the larches that climbed higher up the steep, that the young man, full of hope and fresh spirits, made a hasty meal and was off, forgetting to

change his silver-laced suit, as he intended, for one of plain dark green, of commoner stuff such as any huntsman might wear. Whatever adventures were before him, he wished to meet *incognito*. "Never mind," he thought, "I shall meet some one with whom I can change." So up he went, merrily now, for the fresh sweet air and the scent of the pines and larches went into his very soul. A squirrel leapt along before him, and Egbert ran after it like any boy. Dream or no dream, vow or no vow, he was off for a holiday. But he was far from well, and by the time he had left the larches his spirits drooped. He could not eat the food the forester's wife had given him—of the best you may be sure, but still only food for the day. He rather wanted to lose himself and meet with adventures. But he could not touch the food—only he emptied the little flask of wine. In vain : his spirits had gone down a dreadful gulf, and the "woe, bitter woe," "the snowy lips," the memories of dead Elidore and the plague, came over him irresistibly. He could not walk. He could not weep ; but at least the wine gave his lips some freedom, and

he lay on the crisp, sweet grass, and cried with all his might to God for help.

Whether it was in answer to his prayer, or what we call coincidence, or whether heaven was, as it were, laughing at his conceited self-will, I cannot say—strange things have happened to me, and doubtless to



"He lay on the crisp, sweet grass."

you, of which we cannot tell the meaning—but so it was, that after that almost hopeless prayer—which after all was very simple, and to this effect: "Give me pain or pleasure, joy or sorrow, health or sickness, life or death, but give me Amethyst"—with all his most dreadful memories and forebodings sweeping over his

weak, faint heart, after this prayer this heroic young man, who must needs chalk out for himself a devotion to an unknown dismal ideal, rose up and saw in the bright summer sunlight a mountain foxglove. And what of that? Did the fatal rose-purple hue sink him into deeper abysses of melancholy, as he remembered the twice-seen boding cloud? Did those cool purple lips woo him to eat poison and die? No. You will laugh. All-creating Heaven laughed at the young devotee; certainly Mother Earth laughed at him; and as he looked the sky laughed, the larches below took a brighter green, a thrill ran through his hair and over his whole skin—he rose on his knees beside the flower and said, “O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches.” Then he kissed the flower, then tore it up, root and all, and, tossing it into the air and catching it, bounded up the slope like a goat, shouting “Amethyst! Amethyst!” For Amethyst was a golden-haired girl, and this Alpine foxglove was yellow.

CHAPTER XIII.

MORE BOTANY.

UP the steep he went, his sickly melancholy going from him at every stride. But his mind would not carry his body for ever. So when, just at the edge of the snow, he met a young chamois-hunter with his bow, he was glad to be invited to rest in a little cabin of hurdles and turf which the hunter had not far off. And right proud was the sportsman to dine with a Prince; for Egbert, whose silver lace of course betrayed him, made the hunter sit down and share his provisions, though he himself was too excited to eat much.

After he had rested awhile, the Prince bethought him of the opportunity of changing his clothes, and,

hastily writing a line, "To make you right when they ask if you have murdered and robbed me," he changed with the merry young hunter.

"Now is there any dwelling along this way?" he asked. "None," replied the youth, "unless your Highness keeps this track to your right. It is very plain, but you must not follow it to the end. In half-a-mile you will come to a hollow."

"How shall I know it?"

"You cannot help knowing it; your Highness never saw such a nook; down that you must go. And then you will turn a corner, and your Highness"—
"Never mind 'Highness'; I am very tired," for indeed, after sitting, Egbert's limbs were very stiff and weak, and what was worse, you know, he could not eat.
"Tell me what is round this corner."

"A little chapel, please your Hi——and a priest's house." "Priest's house?" and his weary heart leapt again; "and where is the parish?"

"I rather think I and two others are the parish," laughed the young man; "it is an old monk's chapel, perhaps; *I* don't know. I believe the good bishop

sends priests there for a holiday when he thinks mountain air and goat's milk will do them good."

"And pray, Parish, do you know who is taking holiday there now?"

"I don't, your——sir; but there *is* some one there, for I saw smoke last night."

"Thank you; good-bye," and they parted.

Egbert had never noticed that in stature, hair, and features the young huntsman was strikingly like himself.

On went Egbert, feeling more and more tired, yet kept up by excitement, till he came to the oddest nook of a hollow you ever saw—a deep funnel-like cleft, with flowery turf at the sides, and, sure enough, a corner at the bottom. Down the elastic turf the Prince slid, and ran along to the corner, where an elbow of turf and rock jutted at the left. To the right was the steep turfy slope; the bottom was now very narrow. Round the corner Egbert turned, not noticing in his haste a beautiful sight to his right, the only way that the hollow opened. All his eyes were for the little stone chapel and tiny house built against it. A tiny,

tiny place it was, with perhaps two or three rooms, and a very low door. Egbert knocked, and Amethyst opened the door.

Whether the Prince kissed her or not is not recorded, neither have I been able to find by careful search in the Maritanian records whether she boxed his ears. Nor can I learn what she said. Not much, probably, for she was much surprised, and was, moreover, getting her father's evening meal, of which she promised Egbert a share if he were good. Very good indeed the young man was, as he watched the merry, slender, stooping girl about her work. I believe she made more of it than was necessary. Why, cannot be known. Anyhow, Egbert had time to watch her. She was clad this time in crimson purple—no, not the colour of foxglove—the colour of dark red wine, against which her golden curls—tired Egbert laughed to himself now as he called them foxglove curls—shone bright in the sun. For the door, I must tell you, faced the opening of the hollow, and that faced the west, where the sun was now setting. And perhaps, now I think of it, even had Egbert looked

that way, he might have missed the curious sight, for the dazzle of the sun, and the shadows which it cast. But he was quite happy to watch his hostess, and say to himself—

“Amethyst, sunlight-kissed,
Glowing with a purple ray—
Ne'er more bright than when red light
Ends the tearful stormy day:
Such is true love's constant way.”

Then in came the bearded priest, who, with glad surprise, made the young man welcome. And all through the evening, Egbert heard his pleasant fatherly talk and Amethyst's saucy impertinences in a happy dream. But they could not make him eat more than what the priest called a meal for a sparrow. The “sparrow” was glad enough to go to roost on a heather bed in a little upper room where he could not stand upright.

He slept a long time, and when he woke he did not know he was awake, for he was in a fever. Fortunately for his secret, his delirium was very slight, and in it he ran upon childish things about Elidore,

and Isabel, and the dove, and a dog he had when a boy. So that, though he lay ill for a month, the old priest who tended him never suspected that his patient was any more than a simple gentleman.

One night, as he lay conscious for a time, he saw through the window a brilliant shooting star go by, leaving a trail of luminous ashes across the blackness of the night. And it amused him to see how the train sank down—"like," he thought dreamily, "a dog's tail when he lets it down." Then he wondered sleepily what was the use of it, and went off into a sweet sound sleep, from which he woke to call for goat's milk. He had never tasted it, but the young hunter had named it, and it had stuck in his fancy. His fancy was right; he grew stronger day by day, and at last, one fine morning, dressed, and came down the little ladder. You may wonder why he began in the morning; but he was a wilful young man. And an ignorant young man in many ways, too. As you have seen in the case of the foxglove, his science was neglected. Oscar and Edric could have told him that shooting stars were fragments of a

broken planet—fragments which, ignited by friction as they passed with enormous speed through our atmosphere, and being mostly iron, left a trail of white hot oxide of iron, which must, sooner or later, sink to the earth as dust. They could have told him how many tons are added to this globe daily by the dust-ashes from thousands of shooting stars, seen and unseen. Edric collected, the day before his death, a paper of black “meteoric dust” from the mountain snow, and was planning a pamphlet to prove that it was from this dust that *Protococcus nivalis* got its mineral food, consisting of iron; whence the colour of the plant.

But poor ignorant Egbert knew nothing of this. Yet his heart was sweetened with returning health and thankfulness. The good priest was out, and he lay on a heap of turf, covered with a cloak, and chatting with Amethyst, who had been sadly anxious about him, poor child! She had been lamenting her father’s wandering habits and unpunctuality—how he was never in to meals, and how she kept some hold on him by threatening to be late for service—when Egbert’s eye, leaving her face, and the humble belong-

ings of the little cabin, fell on the sunny peaks I mentioned as all the distant landscape you could see from the hollow. Not so very distant; about two miles. They were now bright in the morning sun. And Egbert saw—sunlight-kissed indeed—for the first time in his life the *Protococcus nivalis*. Do you want to know what that is? Lean against the apple-tree, and then look at the back of your coat. Well, fancy that green dust *rose-crimson*, and spread over a mile of snow, and you will see what Egbert saw, the famous red snow of the Alps and of the Northern Wastes. That was what the shooting stars fed—as poor Edric thought.

—“Bad enough to be a priest’s daughter—pity a priest’s wife,” or some such chatter Amethyst was running on with, while Egbert’s eye was drinking that glorious show, doubly dyed with its own hue and the red morning light; for the wilful youth had lain in bed a day when the priest told him he might get up, and then must needs come down very early. Well, he had his reward, for behind the hollow the morning sky was flaming rose, and

as this light fell full on the red snow of the opposite peaks, wave after wave of triumphant gladness surged up in his heart.

"O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom



"Amethyst looked at him straight for a moment."

hast Thou made them all," his heart sang again—and then, "My soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler; the snare is broken and we are escaped."

All this passed in a minute, during which he made some answer, he knew not what, to Amethyst—doubtless pleasant, coloured by his own absent thoughts. The child seemed in no way to feel his inattention.

Then he said, as quietly as if nothing had happened, “And how would you like to be a schoolmaster’s wife, Amethyst?”

“Shouldn’t mind; I’d box the boys’ ears enough.”

“Then be my wife, Amethyst,” he said; “I’m second master, and expect to be head soon, in a big school down yonder,” pointing to the north, as he guessed it by the sun. Amethyst looked at him straight for a moment to see if he were joking, and answered, “I don’t mind, but we’ll see what my father says;” and in came the priest.



C H A P T E R X I V.

THE BETROTHAL.

“GOOD morning, Father,” said the young man, to avert the scolding he saw in the priest’s eyes for his rashness.

Egbert had never so addressed him before, but it came so natural to the good man in his pastoral character that he was hardly surprised.

“We were just admiring the mountains yonder.”

And Amethyst, who had, in truth, just caught sight of the wondrous show, took her big father by the shoulders, and, jumping up to kiss him, turned him round to the door. For a full minute the three stood entranced. The sky at their backs was, unseen, flaming redder than before, so that the common white snow of some peaks flushed like any rose—a hue almost enough of itself to have broken the dream and

fulfilled the vow. But where that red flush fell upon the crimson snow, what words can picture the colour? Rubies? amethysts? Not so purple as the latter, though the Prince's heart was full of the name, the pointed peaks seemed to make A's and M's. You know the heart-piercing red that tips a daisy? Fancy the whole flower in so red a light that the white petals blushed rosy, and think what the tips would be. Certainly it pierced the hearts of all—the very colour of love. And the priest, who had obtained leave to retire for six months to this sinecure of a mountain hermitage, that he might rest from his pastoral labours and finish a learned theological work many years planned, blamed himself that he had never taken any notice of this wonder, though his eyes must have fallen on it again and again. At last he broke silence—

“O God, O good beyond compare!
If thus Thy meaner works are fair,
If thus Thy beauties gild the span
Of ruined earth and sinful man;
How glorious must the mansion be
Where Thy redeemed shall dwell with Thee!”

He repeated these lines so slowly and solemnly that Egbert, who felt that now was the time to speak, grew rather impatient.

“Father,” he said, standing—for he had forgotten his weakness—“three years ago I had a dream, and I vowed to obey it, and to woo no bride but only her who had lips like snow and hair like a foxglove.”

“And what did you mean by such nonsense?” asked the elderly man, with good-natured reproof.

“I don’t exactly know,” returned the youth, looking very foolish. “But two years after, I met your daughter” (no, it was no use looking round for Amethyst to help him, she had slipped away into the background, and, blushing back to the mountains which the two men still faced, was laughing at him from behind a curtain—he had to go on) “and loved her. And then I thought I had broken my vow, and prayed about it. Then came the plague, and when I saw the white lips, I prayed I might take it and die.”

“And what good would that have done, pray?”

“But I did not.”

Amethyst's father raised his bushy eyebrows in mock surprise.

"And at last I set out to those mountains, for I had vowed to win my bride within three years, and they were gone, all but a fortnight."

Here he turned and saw Amethyst making faces at him, which rather spoiled his solemnity; however, he went on bravely.

"And on my way I prayed again, and then I found this," showing a withered weed which he had somehow blindly kept about him or near him through all the fever.

"Well?" asked the priest, taking a disreputable, crushed, dried herb which did not seem to illustrate the subject—"Well?" turning it over with a puzzled air.

"It is a yellow foxglove, sir, and Amethyst's hair—"

"Ho, ho!" laughed the priest; "I see; all this is to prove that you are the fated Prince that is to carry off my daughter! And those, sir!" looking to the mountains, "I suppose are her lips? Come, Amethyst,

what say you?" and the laughing girl came out from her hiding-place, and peeped on tiptoe over her father's shoulder.

"Don't you think this a very beautiful sermon? Now if you will sit down, I will preach you one."

And the young man sat down on the turf heap, and Amethyst beside him, her hand in his.

"I quite believe, my son, that marriages are made in heaven. I am sure her mother's and mine was. She is just what her mother was at her age"—Amethyst was eighteen—"worth her weight in gold. It will be death to me to part with her. But I can trust her to you, sir, little as I know of you, for I have loved you as a father. But mind, I will have nothing to do with your dreams and vows. Your dream may have been from God, or it may have been a temptation of the enemy, who knows what a salvation true love and marriage are to a young man. I know he delights to tempt a betrothed pair to break their troth. Perhaps he will tempt you. Or perhaps, my son, your troubles in this sort are over. But be strong in faith. And remember that your love is only a means to an end,

the glory of God, whom you must always put first. Forget this, and centre all your love on one another, and you will find disappointment and sorrow. Those mountain-tops are earthly, after all, and you will both find that, without God's help, earthly love will draw us down from Him. As to your dream, it would be rash for me to say anything: God may have sent it, after all, or it may have been purely natural and a mere accident. But God is pleased often to lead us by accidents. I always say that an accident is a thing brought about by the management of angels, good or bad, according as we are walking in faith or not. God seems to have led you to your wife. But I think you should have told some one your dream, and sought advice—did you?"

"No one," replied Egbert, "at the time."

"I thought not. If you had taken counsel with some one older and wiser, I think you would have been content with plain duties without making artificial ones. As to the dream, you might have prayed God to bring it to pass or bring it to nothing, according as it were good or evil. 'Thy will be done in me,

by me, and upon me' is a good prayer. But even when we make ways for ourselves, though they are often crooked, God has patience with us, and if we will let Him, brings them round to a good end. So He has, it seems, in your case, so far. This should encourage you to trust Him and follow Him more simply to your life's end. For love and marriage are not *the* work of life, but only, as I said, a means, and in most cases a necessary means, to the work of that life which we begin here, but which will never end. Let it be your object and purpose to help one another in God's ways, and you will never regret your marriage. But now, sir, you must tell me a little more: I know nothing of the position of my future son-in-law."

You see the good man's worldly wisdom and prudence were about equal to those of the fowls of the air. And Egbert answered boldly—he had listened as dutifully as he could to this discourse, sitting with Amethyst beside him, and her hand in his—but with rather a guilty conscience, as he was now going to practise a little deceit.

" My name, father, is Eyebright." So it was—

Egbert, or Eyebright. He was perfectly and equally entitled to either form. But the Prince was always called Egbert, while Eyebright was, it happened, a very common name in Maritania. And the priest, with all his learning, had a certain inaccuracy and haziness as to proper names, so that he never recognised the identity, or suspected anything, now or afterwards. No more did Amethyst, who shared—though it is not flattering to say it—all the defects in her father's knowledge, with none of his learning except a sonorous long word or two, which now and then amused Egbert in the midst of her simple talk.

Seeing no signs of suspicion, Egbert went on—“I have a considerable property of my own, besides being, as I told Amethyst, second master in a large school down yonder,” pointing again to the north—“a military sort of place, you know, sir—and expect before long to be head-master.”

This was true in more senses than one; for the Prince (among the various duties of the heir-apparent) *was* now second master in the military college in

which he, Edric, and Brimont had been trained as boys. And the old king was, as a matter of course, nominal head.

"Big boys, you know, sir, and Amethyst says she would like to help keep them in order." He laughed as he thought of the other great schoolroom he had left, picturing Amethyst boxing head-boy Oscar's ears. Isabel did so once, and Oscar thought a moth had brushed against him in the candle-light.

"What say you, Amethyst?" asked her father. "I think I should like it," she said gravely; and, dreadful to say, without any further inquiry, the un-worldly-wise priest was satisfied, and said—"And now we will say our morning prayers, specially thanking God, Eyebright, that he has led you thus far, and restored you to health, and asking His blessing upon your betrothal, and then I will give you my blessing, as father, mind—not as priest."

Then they knelt, and first of all the psalm went up, "O God, Thou art my God: early will I seek Thee. My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh also longeth after Thee, in a barren and dry land where no water is,"

and so forth ; and then the good father returned the thanks, and made the prayer which he had proposed, ending with "Our Father which art in Heaven." Then he rose, and, as the two young things knelt before him, he blessed them in the name of God.



"The two young things knelt before him."

C H A P T E R X V.

THE YOUNG HUNTSMAN.

THE good bishop had certainly found a secret enough hermitage for the pastor to rest in, and the theologian to write in. No one would have suspected a dwelling in that little cleft, and though the track was, as the young huntsman had said, plain enough, you had to strike the track first. It was no human road, but the shore of a lake which had filled the valley, when in colder ages a great glacier from the giant mountain to the west had blocked the lower end, damming in the mountain stream that now flowed down unhindered. And to strike this track was not easy. The Prince in his excitement had bounded and clambered over rough steeps, and awkward loose gravelly slopes, which might have stopped him had he been less

absorbed. And the building *was* an old monk's chapel and dwelling, which the bishop had restored for the purpose to which we have seen it put. Very few knew of it except the chamois hunters of the mountains, and they, as the young man had told the Prince, did not make a numerous parish. Thus it was that the happy three knew nothing of the double calamity that had fallen on Maritania. The first was hardly to be lamented, so natural and so long expected was it. Old King Claude had passed away. The second was indeed a grief and blow. Prince Egbert was dead. At least so all but Oscar and Isabel (whose experience gave them good reason for doubting) believed, when, three weeks after the Prince's departure, the body of the young huntsman was found shattered and frozen in an awful ice valley, a mile higher than where Egbert had met him. The forester of course bore witness that Egbert had worn the silver-laced suit when he left the cabin. In fact, he had said nothing to any one of any intention of changing it or disguising himself, so that question was not raised. And the last tracks that could be

found led straight to the little turf shelter where Egbert had shared with the luckless youth the meal of which a few crumbs and bones were left as traces. Now when, from this shelter, a single track was found leading to the left, straight to the ice-cliff from which the youth had fallen, no one (but Oscar and Isabel) could feel any doubts. No one thought to notice that any one leaving the cabin towards the right must step at once, and for some little distance, over loose purple slates which would leave no mark. But what question was there at all, or could there be, when a body, shattered, it is true, but with Egbert's features still recognisable, and Egbert's hair, and wearing his clothes, was found just where Egbert was going?

The old priest said that Egbert had authorised him, in case of his death, to reveal the details of the dream and vow. And great was the sympathy with the young man who had, right or wrong, borne such a weight for three years, and had now been driven by it to seek—and, alas! win—the snow-lipped bride among the mountains. But Oscar and Isabel would not be convinced. Nor would Oscar, whose word

was now, of course, final, permit the corpse a royal funeral. The most stately requiem that he would permit—the most solemn rite—was performed at the altar in the long grey church. Many a tear was shed, for almost all believed that it was for dead Egbert that their prayers were going up.

And doubtless their prayers were heard, for at that very hour, at the most solemn moment of all, as the bishop, black-vested, stood at the altar, with his back to the living and the dead—at that hour and moment the Prince's sorrow was over, and his betrothal blessing was falling upon him. Doubtless the lonely orphan youth found rest too, if he had, however thoughtlessly, been on the side of the "Christian stuff," as honest Brimont calls the good that struggles in baptised folk, as were the Maritanians. Over his tomb in the transept (Oscar would not allow it the royal place in a special chapel) was a white stone, with only—"A MARITANIAN." For such he was, now since the union, to whichever side of the mountains he belonged. Isabel was comforted to believe that her brother had changed clothes with

one of Oscar's former subjects, so that Maritania had wept and honoured as a brother one who in life had worn the light green. Here possibly she was right; but the young man's coat was so ancient, faded and weathered (it had been his father's), that Egbert had laughed as he gave up the attempt to settle whether it had been the colour of the pine or of the larch. Anyhow, Oscar and Isabel stuck to the theory that Egbert had exchanged clothes, by strange chance, with his double and likeness, and would return.

Oscar, you will see, was bound both by memory and by conscience on the one hand, and on the other by brotherly honour, to hold this view as long as it was at all tenable. And as two more months went on, and no trace or tidings of Egbert could be obtained from among the mountains, or indeed anywhere, he still refused the people's unanimous cry that he would take his place as their king. For two or three months he had won the people's hearts by his new quiet simplicity; for indeed he was a strong man, beginning life over again, and took Isabel's counsel very much, and listened still more to any of

Egbert's councillors, even the humblest, with, if you can imagine it, the manly humility and yet confidence of a man who knew that he had turned round, and that all his strength was now set on the right track; a man in the prime of life, who had no reason to be hasty in his penitence, but went quietly and firmly to work. And his humility did not lead him to hold the white wand with a slack hand. He heard all that Isabel and the council had to say, and took more pains than Egbert or King Claude had ever taken to learn the mind of the people. But when he had heard, and turned all over in that close-cropped red head of his, he did what Oscar thought best, and no one could move him.

This was seen even in two or three months, in a little difficulty with a troublesome little dependency on the east, a difficulty which had to be settled at once; it was seen in all the changes which the old King's death rendered necessary, and still more in this matter of the Prince's reputed death, and the funeral of the unknown hunter. Honesty *is* the best policy. And if Oscar had—which I do not believe—

any hope of the crown for himself, he was certainly going the best way to work. If the Prince came back, Oscar had done his duty; if not, his claim by inheritance was secure, and his hold on the people grew stronger every day. It was impossible that he could overlook this, and these thoughts must have all gone to confirm him in refusing the crown. But, you see, he felt certain the Prince would return. Though the Maritanian costume was simple in the extreme—fine fabrics being exceedingly scarce—though the Prince shared this simplicity to the full, and though the ancient coat had been the only thing disreputable about the stranger, Egbert's one personal attendant made a difficulty about the underclothing. I just now called the huntsman an orphan. It seemed so far likely that he was, by the fact that none was found to miss him. But perhaps he came from one of the remote villages of Oscar's extreme western border, where his old mother—if he had one—may have simply thought his absence unusually long. At any rate, no one could be found to claim the body on the theory of changed clothes. This was a strong

point in favour of the people's view. But, again, there was something undefinable about the hair; and Isabel missed the silver chain and miniature of herself, which she knew her brother had always worn. This last point was soon settled. Oscar, the silent, brought it out from a secret place in his helmet. Egbert had generously given it to him, saying, "You have more right to this now than I." And Oscar, with his old fox-like nature, had hidden it, to wear round his neck in case of any absence from his wife. But the other point, a certain rough crispness about the hair, and a few other things, though the body was fearfully shattered, could not be so easily disposed of. So Oscar would not be king.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE WEDDING.

THE Prince still needed his people's prayers. Bitterly did the priest and his daughter reproach themselves for what was mainly the young man's fault. As day came on, all doubt was removed, if there was any, as to the true colour of those blushing peaks. For as the red light changed to white, the bare snow took its own hue, and the tinged peaks remained less glorious indeed, but giving the Prince a happy omen that his morning's blessedness would not all pass away like a waking dream. But it was too plain that the cold morning air had done its work, and that a worse illness was upon him. This time there was no childish delirium or sleeping wonder about shooting stars' tails ; it was a long, racking, choking struggle

between life and death, with pain in every joint, which went through Amethyst like a knife. And this time it was a matter of two months, during more than half of which his life hung in the balance.

And surely *now* his secret was discovered, did not the priest go down from the mountains to seek a physician? Well, *over* the mountains would have been his best way, for the healing art had been better cultivated under scientific Duke Oscar than under the simple old soldier-king Claude, among whose people you would scarce find one who knew very much more of medicine than did the priest himself. But neither over nor down the mountains did the priest go. That "red in the morning" was at least as true a warning as Egbert's purple clouds had been. Certainly Amethyst and her father ought, in their patient's behalf, to have noticed how keen and cold and strong the breeze was. The little hollow, you know, was close on the borders of year-long winter, and a constant war of the seasons went on from spring to autumn about those treacherous peaks. By mid-day the sky was dark with whirling specks, that soon whitened all the turf,

and drifted thick into the gully. And in the night a wild wind drove the dry snow from the higher slopes, and shut the three in with a wall of ten feet high and many yards broad. In fact, each entrance to the hollow was entirely filled, and only the elbow aforesaid had kept the house and chapel from being buried. Happily, the goats in their pen were safe, and had a good pile of fodder, and other provisions were, by the good bishop's foresight, in good supply.

But for many weeks, all through Egbert's struggle for life, and for some time after, the three were shut in from the world. And the very purpose of the priest's retirement made it very unlikely that any one would come to seek him. Anyhow, this little snow-hole was forgotten in all the quest for the missing Prince; or, which comes to the same thing, it did not occur to any one that it was worth while to try the dangerous drifts in that direction. Daily, in the little chapel, did the priest, with Amethyst as sole congregation, send up prayers for Egbert, and for any wanderers of the mountains. If, for Egbert, to the prayer of faith was added another ancient rite, it only

shows the simplicity of the Maritanians, who took in the lump whatever was in the old books, no matter whether the writer were John or James. And if Egbert began to rally from that time, that was no more than their faith might claim. And if you ask—How was it that, with Amethyst's father as his sole priestly confidant, Egbert did not reveal his secret? I think I can explain. In that land and time, the priests did indeed receive the same solemn commission as do ours, and the simple people accepted the fact. And, doubtless, the priest remembered to receive freely any confidence Egbert might have to give. But, barring the dream and vow, which were told already, Egbert's inner troubles would be simple enough, such as any young man might have to tell. And the high-minded priest, being his future father-in-law, would be just the one to warn him of any details which would have betrayed him. But so it was, that, deeply as the Maritanians valued the ministrations of their clergy, Egbert remained *incognito*. If you think that at that solemn time he kept undue reticence towards his now adopted father—well, Egbert *was* very reticent, and I

am not answerable for Egbert. Probably he wished to win his bride—if he lived to claim her—before she guessed his rank.

If so, he had his wish. Amethyst now shared the priest's attendance on her betrothed. And as he grew stronger, she often sat by his bed, her hand in his.

"Amethyst," he said one day, "I feel sure I shall recover now. You know your father told us to stand fast in faith, and to fight through any obstacles to the fulfilment¹ of our troth. Now we have very nearly been parted. And if I recover and leave you, who knows what may happen? Your father seemed to warn us that trouble might come to part us. Let us ask him, as he is a priest, to marry us in the little chapel as soon as I can safely venture."

Here I must explain that Maritanian law required no witnesses to a wedding. The priest would have preferred to give his daughter away, and let another marry her. But he could not but admit the force with which Egbert quoted to him his own paternal sermon. So by-and-by—with no rash haste this time, but when the war of the seasons had turned thoroughly in

favour of summer, though the great snow-walls would take long to melt, and Egbert was now much stronger than he had been on that unlucky morning—they were married. The ring was forthcoming. Ever since the morning of his vow, Egbert had worn one, not on a silver chain, but on a rough cord round his neck. That was his fancy at the first. It was picturesque, you see, to devote himself in that way. And after he loved Amethyst, that was not a reason for putting it off. *That* ring had been a narrow hard-fought battle-ground of fears and hopes and scruples about his vow, but it never left him. And it fitted.

As for bridal attire, there was no chance of any. As the sun streamed through the one narrow window, and lighted up those short golden curls on the crimson-clad shoulder, Egbert was amply satisfied, though perhaps Amethyst was not. The wreath, customary there as here, was a difficulty, as, in spite of the warm wind, they were still close prisoners. And even all the wiry flowers of the slopes were buried. But “Wait,” said the priest, on the eve of the wedding; “I will fetch you some amaranth.” And he went out.

The lovers were puzzled. But the theologian, with all his bookish neglect of nature, had odd fits of observation now and then. Was this some memory of *his* old lover-days? Certainly it came partly from his studies. For he returned with hands full of long stalks of brilliant green mountain moss. "See here, children," he said, "the saints in heaven are said to wear amaranth—that is, unfading—wreaths. This will be green through many a year, and when it grows dull, you may revive it again and again by moisture. I have used the same moss for three Easters. Now this will tell you of your love, which, beginning in mortal bodies, is by God's act in the sacrament of marriage made an immortal thing—at least that has always been my belief, and I see not who can say me nay."

You may guess the lovers did not.

"And if ever in life's troubles your love grows dry, and seems to fade, you will often find a few tears will bring it on your hearts as fresh and bright as ever."

So Amethyst wore, and kept till in her old age it fell to pieces, that quaint wreath of vivid green.

And the two stayed with their father and the goats. How the theological book went on I know not. I fear the priest would get a merry scolding from his bishop for his loss of such an opportunity. Probably he would remind the bishop that hospitality was a work of charity. But there the two stayed. And how they passed the time in that damp snow-hole, with nothing to amuse them but three goats, their father, and the sky, with a bit of mountain view from the upper loft, I cannot imagine. But the snow gradually melted, and at last the father went out for a walk over the mountains, and did not return till evening. He must have fallen in with some peasant or huntsman, and must have learned some facts and inferred more, and imparted his guesses. For before the morning, Maritania's capital was in a ferment with joyful excitement (they already knew for certain that Oscar's theory was right, for Oscar himself, searching the fatal spot, had found frozen to the ice Egbert's paper explaining the change of clothes).

But before Maritania could hear the news—in fact, the same evening—the priest came home with a very

severe face, though you might have detected lurking mirth, and addressed Egbert—

“Well, young man, how much longer do you mean to leave your school to take care of itself? Do you think I mean to keep you here honeymooning with my daughter and neglecting your duties? The snow’s clear enough now, sir, and you’ll be off first thing to-morrow morning. I’ll never encourage idleness. You’ve had a longer holiday than I had for my wedding. And I tell you your big boys want looking after, Amethyst.”

But he could act no longer—tears would come to his eyes for old King Claude—and he knelt on one knee.

“The King is dead; long live the King.”



C H A P T E R X V I I.

THE END.

As soon as day broke, Oscar mounted his great white horse, and Isabel her black palfrey, and they rode for the mountains. The people, such as had, or could beg, borrow, or steal horses, were not slow to stream after him along the raised road. But none were permitted to pass into the pine woods, below which the people were to receive their king. Oscar and Isabel went up alone. But I grieve to say they came down far more numerously attended. For as soon as the Prince and Princess were well out of sight, many began to mount the forbidden slopes. What punishment was inflicted on these I have never been able to learn. Certainly it made no difference to their spirits

that day, or the morrow, or the day after. So it must be inferred that Maritania was lawless for once, and excusably.

But I go too fast—too fast even for Oscar and Isabel on the forester's mountain mules. Often Oscar found it easier to dismount and let the beasts scramble for themselves, carrying his wife in his huge arms, or swinging her from rock to rock, with many a laugh from the little brown lady, who was nearly mad with joy. What with the mules, Oscar's scientific mountaineering, and the zeal of the brother and sister, they were at the little hermitage half-an-hour before the stragglers. Much those stragglers were envied by the more orderly and obedient spirits who were, I will say, the majority. And I think the obedient majority had the best of it.

For this is what they saw. First, Egbert walked out of the pine forest alone, waved welcome to all, then went along the line, and actually shook hands with as many as he could. I believe he was kissed by one or two—and men, too, who ought to have known better. But people do not often shake hands

with their kings after they have buried them, so the men may be excused. As for the women, not many had been lucky enough to find horses, and it was far too long a march to give pedestrians any chance. The women that were there—well, I suppose they cried for joy and sorrow, on account of Egbert and Claude, and kissed the young king if they could. But where was the Queen? No one dared stir, with the King before them.

Their patience was rewarded. First, Isabel trotted out on a little mule, dismounted, and stood by the King. But who cared for even Isabel now? The minutes seemed endless. At last a whistle was heard, which all knew as Oscar's call to his dogs, for of course Oscar was a sportsman. Then the King and Isabel turned round sideways, half facing the people and half the dark entrance to the pine wood. Out of it there came slowly, bareheaded, big Prince Oscar and the big priest, carrying on their shoulders a rough seat from the hermitage. At least, so the court records say. The people, of course, could not see the royal seat. All they saw was a grave, slender girl, whose

crimson dress and golden curls gleamed in the evening sun.

Now, Amethyst was not specially fair in face. Her



Queen Amethyst.

great charm, at that time at least, was the slender girlish innocence of her whole look. And the people's

hearts went out to her. But no voice was heard. Whatever head-covering she had worn on the open hill-slopes was now laid aside—she had not needed it in the dusky wood. Her golden hair, quaintly pinned up in a bird-like crest, was more quaintly crowned with the green moss. Advancing towards the centre of the throng, the bearers stood still, and shouted as one, in slow measured syllables, with all the power of their broad chests, “Welcome, Queen Amethyst!” At that broke out such a roar that Amethyst turned whiter than ever, and the horses thought a battle was on hand, and neighed again. After a moment or two a rosy colour came into Amethyst’s cheeks, and as she remembered that these were the “big boys,” she clapped her hands and laughed, and threw kisses to them all.

But very serious was that little face in the long grey church on the next day. All Maritania’s noblest and fairest, and as many of her humblest as could find standing-room in the long nave, thronged the house of God. But these she scarcely marked. Only her heart swelled with a sense of that vast concourse of

brothers—so she deemed them. All her eyes were on her King, or on the altar where the bishop stood in cloth of gold, and all her mind was in what passed. And in it all she was at the King's side. For though queens had not beforetime shared in their husbands' rule, or been more than their beloved home consorts, the people had sworn in the council hall, that if ever Egbert came home with his bride, she should be as himself in all things. They would obey her as they obeyed their king. And Egbert, who could not have forced this change on his people, accepted it with joy. As for Amethyst, she was already his sworn wife; so whatever his work had been, she was ready to share it so far as she might. And this work she might, by the united will of king and people. So they were to be crowned as equals in right, and what rule or obedience was between these two was left to their marriage vow, as a matter for them and God. To the people they were to be equal in all things. So when Egbert swore to observe all the ancient laws and liberties, to love his people and defend the faith, she swore too; when he bowed upon his face before

the altar, she bent beside him as the choir chanted its solemn strains of devotion. Whether the king stood, or knelt, or bowed on his face to the earth, as these words were sung and holy prayers said, Amethyst was beside him. And what was the choir? The choir was that vast concourse that filled the church from end to end and from side to side of the transepts. For the Maritanians used no harmony or cunning tunes. Their psalms were chanted to simple ancient melodies in which all joined *as one*. The men's voices gave a full deep thunder of sound—mighty rolling waves, on which the women's voices, an octave higher, ran like wavelets. And as the waves and wavelets of the sea are crisped with tiny running ripples, so, a fifth above the women's voices shrilled the children's lark-like notes. This was their national mode of singing, and the simple melodies were familiar to the poorest and youngest. And as that billowy rippled river of sound rolled on, Amethyst's father thought of that day when the singers and the trumpeters were *as one* in praising and thanking God, when the glory of the Lord filled the temple, so that

the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud. As for Amethyst, the volume of sound seemed to take her heart out of her breast and lift it above the roof, that seemed to rend as she thought of that glorious Day to be.

And the bishops brought out of an ivory chest holy oil and a golden spoon, and the lawful King and the first reigning Queen of Maritania had the grace of God's Spirit given them for all their royal works and ways, and stood forth as one, anointed.

But whatever was said or done, Amethyst's heart was full of the glorious Day to come. When, for lack of a second crown, on account of the old custom, the same crown, glittering with seven emeralds and one amethyst, was set first on her husband's black locks and then on her golden curls, she heeded not the gems, nor thought of her name—though that had gone to the people's heart, as it went at first to the Prince's heart, as an omen. For the great amethyst of Maritania was a gem beyond all gems. Perhaps I may tell you the story of it some day. But whatever

was said or done, one thought was in Amethyst's heart, of the Day when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, when He shall take to Him His great power, and reign.



